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LAYING BOTH HANDS ON THE ROCK, SHE UNITED ALL HER STRENGTH IN A SUPREME EFFORT. IT WOULD NOT BUDGE.

In Spite of Herself; or, Jeannette's Reparation.

BY S. R. SHERWOOD.

CHAPTER I.

THE MASTER OF BELLE ISLE.

THERE is, somewhere on the coast of Maryland, within a cannon-shot of the main shore, an isolated island, of a league, more or less, in circumference, which is called Belle Isle.

The aspect of this place is poor and sterile. The inhabitants, more-

over, are not over-fortunate or numerous. A paltry hamlet, of a dozen or so houses, contains them all. The coast facing the village is almost always deserted, except at the hour of departure or re-entrance of four or five fishing-smacks, which they drag up on the beach by means of an old capstan planted in the soil.

Yet this place, so sad and so solitary to-day, appears to have been of considerable importance at those distant times which followed the early settlement of the colonies. At the time of the American Revolution it was a hamlet of some note, and belonged to one of the most illustrious Catholic families of the province. It is true that this family, which assumed to date back to the conquest of the Gauls by Cæsar, had been somewhat despoiled of its pristine splendor. After having possessed numerous castellanies and marquises, its patrimony had been reduced,

little by little, till it was forced to emigrate from the mother country and take the proprietorship of Belle Isle. It came about, at the time of which we are writing, that the head of the direct branch of this family, the Chevalier Hugo Prevost, departed life at his little manor of Belle Isle, leaving as heir to his name and the remains of his fortune his nephew, Gerald Prevost, a young man of twenty years, whom he had adopted and always treated as his own child. When the good old chevalier, overcome by age and infirmity, felt his end approaching, Gerald was at Baltimore, completing his studies in William and Mary College. Leaving there in the greatest haste, in order to receive the last adieus of his venerable relative, he arrived just in time to close his eyes; and the profound grief which he evinced at his bereavement testified to his instinctive nobleness and goodness of heart. He took possession of the modest heritage of his uncle, and installed himself in the little manor which its neighbors persisted in calling the chateau of Belle Isle.

This manor, of severe aspect, rose at the northern extremity of the isle, and seemed to have been constructed at an epoch when the advantages of comfort and salubrity were never taken into consideration by architects and proprietors. In the season of storms the elements would unchain themselves, with all their fury, on the surroundings.

Save the memory of his uncle, which came occasionally to sadden his thoughts, Gerald accepted, without misanthropy, the solitude and isolation of his home. Never had lighter, gayer, or more heedless youth trod the sands or heaths of Belle Isle. Although absolute master of the rock on which he lived, and all there were disposed to accord him boundless respect and obedience, the joyous Gerald did not dream of taking advantage of his position with his poor tenants and followers. His ambition was to surpass the young men of the vicinity in those physical exercises observed in the country; he did not disdain to mingle with the humblest of his neighbors in their games and fetes, where he was always welcomed with the highest joy. In proportion as the young master of Belle Isle was charitable and indulgent toward his inferiors, he was cold and reserved toward the better classes of the vicinity. Opposite Belle Isle, on terra firma, was a hamlet of some importance, called Bristol, where resided a number of English landed proprietors in easy circumstances, and a few English revenue officers and small public functionaries, with their families, constituting what was considered and termed *the society* at that time and place. Gerald Prevost participated willingly enough in the reunions of the good people of Bristol, to whom he was constrained to listen as they praised his ancestry and the qualities he had derived from them; but he felt no sympathy with these people, whom the traditions of his own family and race had taught him to dislike. Yet, while intrepid, disdainful, oftentimes "cutting" with the men, he observed toward the ladies, of whom many were young and attractive, only that exquisite manner and graceful tone which were natural to him.

Such, then, was the physical, moral, and social position of Gerald Prevost, the master of Belle Isle, at the time of his introduction to the reader.

One clear morning in October, equipped for the chase, Gerald issued from the house to indulge his favorite exercise. As he walked along he hummed a hunting air, while his spaniel danced around him in circles, as if sharing his gayety. The young man was following a path which conducted to the principal settlement of the island, when, arriving at a wooded hight, whence he could perceive the hamlet with its Gothic church and the little port with its barks idly resting on the sandy beach, he espied, on looking backward, a man rapidly climbing the ascent behind him. Our hero awaited the newcomer, who appeared to be about sixty years of age, and wore an old French costume, that distinguished him sufficiently from the common people of Belle Isle. Gerald recognized the venerable Victor, a domestic grown old in the service of his family, who had become, since the death of the chevalier, his major domo, his factotum—in short, the prime minister of his government in miniature.

"Well, my brave Victor," said he, gayly, with the rough tone of voice in which he was accustomed to address the old man, "whence comes that wry face of ill-omen? I would wager that you have again been talking politics below there, with the loafers of Bristol. Come! open your budget. What news to-day?"

Victor uncovered his white hairs and bowed respectfully.

"The news I bring this morning is not to be smiled at, Master Gerald," he said, gravely. "We should rather weep. They say that France has become the ally of the rebels, and that no Frenchman is safe, surrounded, as you are, by colonists of Tory sympathies, without having declared your loyalty. Nor is this all. The rebels are now beaten on all sides, and have just been terribly whipped by General Howe, at Germantown, with a loss of forty thousand men."

"Let us go! let us go!" laughed Gerald, completely reassured by this exaggerated sum total. "I will answer that this slaughter will not be repeated on the rocks of Belle Isle. But I must be off, for I count on some capital shots before high tide."

"Alas! master, master," said Victor, sadly, "this is no time to dream of duck-hunting. You do not believe me; I see it, and yet many things are passing around you. Your neighbors of Bristol are talking of the strangeness of your delay in espousing the British cause, and some of the old families of French extraction, of doubtful sympathies, as, for example, the Lavilles and the Du Ponts, are repairing to Baltimore, New York, and other cities now held by the English, to escape the scrutiny with which they are watched at home."

"You tell me, my good Victor, of old men and women, whom the least event frightens, because they are rich and defenseless. But, who would dream of molesting me on this sterile rock in the ocean?"

"And yet, master, what would you do, some fine morning, should a band of Tory adventurers descend upon and destroy the chateau and murder you?"

"What would I do? I would arm my six servants, name brave Victor Tassaint my captain-general, and, at the head of that army vigorously charge the enemy. It would require more than a robber force to preserve itself from being driven back into the sea in the twinkling of an eye!"

Gerald's countenance glowed with another smile; but the old intendant did not now appear to take, in bad part, his master's gayety.

"That thought belongs to you, my young master," replied Victor, with a satisfied air. "And a siege would be a good thing, and would redound to the credit of your name."

Though quite accustomed to the eccentricities of his major-domo, the young master of Belle Isle could not conceal his surprise at seeing a joke thus taken in seriousness.

"What! Victor," asked he, "if that idea of resistance really occurred to me, do you think I would find any one here disposed to defend me?"

The eyes of the old man sparkled as he answered:

"By Saints Paul and Victor, my worthy patrons, I can always respond for one! As to the fishermen and your tenants," continued he, shaking with a menacing gesture the baton he held in his hand, "I would like to see them hesitate. But to do them justice, they all love you, as they have good reason, you spoil them so much! You do them so much honor in allowing—but you wish no one to speak of that!"

And the old man uttered a sigh.

"Bah! You are always venturing on this disagreeable theme," replied Gerald, with a slight expression of discontent.

"Very well, master; you have control of your own actions. But I—I cannot approve a descendant of the Prevosts maneuvering a treacherous craft, as I saw you do in the last storm, when you were returning from fishing with old Peter, or, still worse, your consenting to receive those thumps in the head from Sailor Joe, at the festival."

"Really, a saint with your exalted idea of my personal dignity, would lose his patience. Remember that when I was maneuvering there below, in the middle of the channel, it was a matter of life or death to manage the bark in that frightful squall; and if I had not worked my best with old Peter and his son, I, the descendant of the Prevosts, would have perished like a numskull, and served as food for the fishes. As for Sailor Joe, from whom you say I received those thumps at Bristol, I am proud at having honestly returned his blows with interest. The lesson I taught him, will subdue his confidence, I assure you; he appreciates very little, I gage, the honor he experienced in measuring with me, although I abandoned to him the prize of the combat, which was, if my memory serves, a superb pair of cow-hide shoes."

At this stage of the conversation, which, as we have said, took place on a solitary land-

scape, exposed to the impetuous wind that blew from the offing, the old man directed the attention of our hero to two small boats, just departing from the village of Bristol, as they appeared struggling with an effort against the waves of the channel.

"There, master!" said he. "It looks as if we were going to have visitors to-day."

"Visitors!" said Gerald, turning quickly. "Yes, egad; it is true. And I had forgotten all about it! On my soul, if I had been caught hunting, I should have been in a pretty mess with the good ladies of Bristol."

"What do you say, master?" asked Victor, disturbed.

"Well! Three or four days since, I met a number of ladies at Squire Brown's, who manifested a strong wish to see and put to test the Rocking Stone of Belle Isle, which, as you are aware, we do not permit every one to approach."

"The Rocking Stone! The talisman of your family!" repeated the old man, reproachfully. "That seems almost a profanation!"

"Pshaw! superstition has turned your head, as well as others—I know better than any one the legend of the Rocking Stone. So I invited all who were present on the occasion to which I alluded, to come to-day to Belle Isle, to see its curiosity and souvenir."

"And to take dinner, perhaps," suggested Victor.

"No; be assured—yet we can hardly expect to escape offering them a modest collation of some kind. They will be indulgent for my boyish forgetfulness; and you, Victor, must assist to repair my mistake."

"I will do my best. But you, master," inquired the old servant, with solicitude, "are you going to receive the company in that dusty dress and hat?"

"What's the odds?—yet, on reflection, this garb is hardly appropriate for the reception of ladies. Let us go in quickly."

He threw his gun across his shoulder, and resumed his homeward march with such rapid strides that Victor was shortly out of breath.

"One minute, Victor," said he, pausing, "and you may follow at your ease. Tell me, you, who know all the saints of the calendar, with their different attributes and special providences, who is he that protects the lover?"

"Why do you ask me that, master?" said the honest old man, simply enough.

"Because I will offer him a candle as high as a ship's mast!" said the thoughtless youth, laughing aloud.

And he ran in the direction of the chateau, followed by his French spaniel, which appeared surprised enough at the sudden change of purpose.

CHAPTER II. AN ESCAPE.

AMONG the aboriginal monuments of Belle Isle was an enormous rock, destined to play an important role in this history, which stood on the slope of a cliff, at some distance from the chateau. It was oval in form, flattened, and so singularly placed that the feeblest hand, even that of a child, would suffice to produce in it an oscillatory movement, very perceptible, which, considering its ponderousness, made it appear a veritable prodigy to those ignorant of the laws of mechanics. By reason of this marvelous circumstance, it received the name of the Rocking Stone.

The ancestors of Gerald had brought with them from the mother country a legend, transmitted from the priesthood of ancient Gaul, that a rocking stone would serve to test the innocence or guilt of women suspected by their friends, lovers or husbands. If the stone, after long and solemn invocation, obeyed the impulse of the person who submitted to the test, and visibly moved, suspicion was allayed; but if the rock remained motionless, as it might happen when the accused had not won the sympathy of the spirits stationed to guard the monument, woe to the unfortunate one! Since their emigration to this continent, it had been customary for the Prevosts, on the day of the marriage of a gentleman of that name, for the new husband and the new wife to come in great pomp, to the chateau of Belle Isle, where the newly married submitted to the test of the Rocking Stone, in the midst of a crowd of invited guests. The stone had never been known to fail of complaisance for these noble proprietors; and we are even assured that at the marriage of a sire of the Prevosts, with one Blanche Devereaux, who passed for a prodigy of virtue and piety, the Rocking Stone oscillated of its own accord, before it had been touched by the beautiful bride,

as if to render her homage. A monument of such importance could not be left at the service of mere curiosity-seekers; so one of the more ancient proprietors of Belle Isle had surrounded the stone with a wall surmounted by iron pickets to defend it from approach. The key of that inclosure was solemnly presented to the succeeding master, the day he took possession of his property, and he was enjoined never to confide it to any one.

Now, it was especially to see this marvel and to test its celebrated experience, that the good people of Bristol had taken Gerald Prevost at his word and thus come to visit his domain.

Gerald was so expeditious in his toilet that the company had not yet appeared in the narrow avenue of oaks that led to the manor ere he was dressed and prepared to receive them. He now wore a velvet habit, from which the delicate sword of chased steel, that depended handsomely, relieved the basque; a satin vest, above which floated a shirt-frill loaded with jewels; and breeches of black silk. A touch of powder had restored all its freshness to his head-dress, and his hat, laced with gold, was borne carelessly under his arm. In that elegant costume, the charms of the master of Belle Isle were displayed to their best advantage.

A numerous group was entering the path at the extremity of the avenue. Victor, muttering, went forth to assure himself that his female aides-de-camp had omitted nothing that could impart to the visitors a lofty idea of the splendor of the chateau of Belle Isle. Gerald, leaning his forehead against the glass of one of the little bay-windows that lighted the hall, was examining the strangers with lively interest.

The latter were from fifteen to twenty in number. At their head, as guide or pioneer, advanced a personage in black riding-coat and silver-gray wig, who was Brown, the Bristol lawyer. He was a tall, dry man, of certain pretensions to historical erudition, living in high estimation in the surrounding country. Of all the visitors, he was the most intimate with young Prevost, he having been charged with the liquidation of the chevalier's estate and with other interests of Gerald's. Among the Squire's complacent followers first came his son, a lean, cadaverous, stupid youth, whose too straight garments set off still more palpably his sharp joints; then his clerk, Ralph Anderton, one of the *characters* of the village, in a dress exaggerated in his effort to follow the burlesque fashions of the day. Though he passed for a shrewd man, his forked countenance wore an expression of malice and causticity rather than genuine intelligence; but the moment he was placed under the eye of his patron, he affected a modest, respectful air, and seemed full of admiration for the immense erudition of honest Brown. The other men of the company, for the most part small proprietors and merchants of Bristol, do not merit particular mention, save the custom-house officer, a good-looking fellow, with long mustaches, rather stiff in his black and red uniform, who passed for a furious Tory partisan, and was constantly declaiming against the assurance and injustice of the rebel cause, and predicting the success of the British.

Among the ladies of importance was Miss Martha Brown, the notary's sister, a bitter and garrulous old maid of forty, and Madame and Miss Jeannette L'Estrange, the widow and daughter of the merchant of that name, who was well known in his calling, and had acquired a considerable fortune from the commerce of the mother country. The widow L'Estrange was an illiterate woman of strong prejudices, and therefore showed to no advantage in the society of Bristol, meager as that might be; and she was countenanced as much owing to the special protection of the notary, who had charge of her business affairs, and who, it was said, secretly nourished the project of marrying his son to the daughter of his client, as to her great riches.

In marked contrast with her mother appeared Jeannette L'Estrange. Tall and slender, with a dark brown velvet eye, a brunette complexion and a smiling mouth, the latter possessed a grace and dignity full of charms. She had received a careful education abroad, whence she had returned scarcely a year since; it was generally conceded to be impossible to find in the entire colony a musician more accomplished or a voice more ravishing. But the qualities and talents of this beautiful girl were studiously concealed under an extreme reserve; either from natural timidity or regret at her position, Jeannette always appeared under a painful constraint. Gerald Prevost, alone, despite his apparent lightness, had divined what treasures were veiled under that chaste melancholy, and

yet we shall see anon how falsely he interpreted her.

Jeannette still wore her school-girl costume, a dress, or rather a frock, as they were then called, of blue silk, with a floating girdle. Her beautiful dark hair brushed plainly from her forehead, was held by a ribbon, and escaped from under a little straw hat. The wind occasionally exposed to view her delicate black shoes with silver buckles, and her light embroidered stockings. She at times almost entirely disappeared under the vast folds of her mother's cloak, from which she smilingly disengaged herself.

When Gerald recognized her in the midst of the crowd, he wished to advance to her side; but he apprehended such a proceeding might be ill-interpreted.

It was only after the visitors had crossed the inclosure and entered the court that he stepped forward to receive them.

He welcomed the gentlemen in a few words, and then kissed the ladies, one after another, as he was expected to do, according to the custom of the time, touching lightly the old and furrowed cheeks, and dwelling longer on those more fresh and red. Ending with Jeannette L'Estrange, he whispered in her ear:

"Charming! You have pardoned, then, my audacity in loving you and having dared to tell you of it?"

Jeannette blushed; but Brown, who had just at that moment addressed the master of the house a long and pretentious compliment, made to order for the occasion, diverted attention; the company subsequently entered the hall of the chateau, to rest for an instant.

After a delightful promenade on the strands and heaths of Belle Isle, the guests were subsequently joined around a well-ordered table, owing to the exertions of Victor. When it was time to repair to the Rocking Stone, a few of the invited, including the learned notary himself, were not very firm in their knees, thanks to the excellent wine drawn from the caves of the chevalier.

It was with extreme joy, on going from the chateau, that Gerald saw the company divide itself into small groups, and even into couples passably distant from each other. To his great delight the young daughter was alone with her mother, and when he offered his arm it was accepted.

Our hero pressed tightly to his side the arm of Jeannette passed under his own; but he did not speak, and the young girl, quivering, held her eyes down. Two steps behind, Mrs. L'Estrange followed; but either because she was not vexed at the marked attentions of which her daughter was the object on the part of Gerald, or because she was altogether occupied in picking her own way in that obscure path, she remained far enough behind not to render completely impossible a confidential communication between the young people.

Some minutes elapsed before Gerald, a novice in the business of love, profiting by his favorable opportunity, observed in a tone of affected carelessness:

"I have been all day annoyed at these opportunities that have prevented my being able to say to you a word in secret. Meanwhile, my thoughts have been only with you. I owe you so many thanks for having come to-day! Can I hope the words of love I dared address you at our last interview have been pardoned? You are as good as you are beautiful!"

"Do not talk of ascribing such motives to this indispensable visit," stammered Jeannette, timidly. "My refusal would have given rise to wrong interpretations; again, I must obey my mother."

"Oh! Jeannette, Jeannette, why not let me hope—"

"Well," interrupted the young woman, more firmly, "I will acknowledge the truth; I have obeyed without reluctance my mother's wishes, and have not submitted to ceremony in coming here, for I had something to say to you, a prayer to address you."

"A prayer—you? Oh! speak, speak!"

"I wished to conjure you, Mr. Prevost, to reflect upon the immense distance which separates you from a girl of my obscure origin, and to ensure that you will cease these assiduous attentions, which may provoke gossip and scandal."

Gerald remained a moment silenced by the blow.

"So then," replied he, at length, with an accent of grief mingled with spite, "you do not love me?"

Jeannette preserved silence.

"In fine," continued Gerald, growing ani-

mated, "I have long remarked and should have remembered the kind looks you bestow on the ridiculous son, and the clerk of the squire. One of them is undoubtedly the chosen—"

"One I pity; by the other I am inspired with fear," interrupted Jeannette, with vivacity. "Mr. Prevost esteems me little enough to believe that I could so ill place my heart."

"Well, then, some other more worthy."

"No, Mr. Prevost," responded Jeannette, with a sigh, "no one has inspired me with the sentiments you suggest; I even believe that if heaven had not interposed between us the barrier of position, perhaps—"

She paused as if frightened at what she had said.

"Thanks!" exclaimed Gerald, with warmth. "Finish! What obstacle can that be between us?"

We cannot surmise what response Jeannette L'Estrange might have made, when the noise of a violent altercation suddenly arose behind them. It was Victor and the custom-house officer, who, in talking politics, had become kindled with excitement and rage.

The officer was bitterly answering one of Victor's tirades; but the quick reply of the latter will suffice to explain the nature of his adversary's response:

"The poverty of my master! His family's decay! What means all that? By St. Michael and all the other saints of the parish! Do you pretend to say that the master of Belle Isle is not more respected than any of your British blockheads of Bristol, or the entire provinces, for that matter? His family was illustrious before the crusades, man! As to his poverty, he is not so rich as he might be, I confess; but if he possessed merely this barren rock, do you suppose his hospitality would be less genuine, or his servitors less devoted than in times past?"

This appeal, which bore directly upon the good cheer of the little manor, was undoubtedly understood, for the reply appeared to be in a sweeter and more amiable tone; but despite all that could be said, Victor's wrath remained unappeased.

"Your protection! that of Mrs. L'Estrange!" replied he, indignantly. "And what need, man, has my master of your protection, or that of any one? I know you to be in collusion with smugglers, and that the money of Mrs. L'Estrange is of essential service in your contraband speculations. When are you coming to attack Mr. Prevost's property? I expect you. Tell your crew that we are not afraid here; bring them on, I defy them!"

At this point of the dispute some one interfered, and nothing further was heard but a confused wrangling.

"What say you, Jeannette, at the manner in which the old fire-cat maintains the privileges of my position?" inquired Gerald, with a smile, addressing the young woman.

"His devotion may make him exaggerate them, even to your ridicule," responded Miss L'Estrange, who, during that pause, had succeeded in moderating her emotion; "but the duties you impose on your position, Mr. Prevost, are not less sacred; they especially interdict what might be called a low marriage."

"A low marriage!" cried Gerald involuntarily. "Jeannette, do you not think I love you with a devotion profound, absorbing, unreserved?"

"Enough," interrupted the young girl, attempting to disengage her arm.

"Listen to me! Do! Let me at least—"

"No; it is useless!" added she, with a choked voice, recalling Victor's disparaging allusion to her mother.

"Do you think I entertain an emotion of pride that would produce an unnatural reserve or make our lives any less happy, Jeannette?" continued Gerald, forcibly detaining her hand. "But this is neither the time nor the place for a conversation of this nature. Consent to meet me Sunday evening at Bristol, in your way to chapel service. I can then speak—"

Jeannette uttered a sharp cry and disengaged her arm with an effort.

"What is the matter? Are you hurt?" asked Mrs. L'Estrange.

"What is it?" echoed the entire company, arrested by the cry.

"Nothing, nothing!" stammered Jeannette.

"What have you done?" growled Victor, turning toward our hero.

The latter, his forehead covered with perspiration and his face flushed, lost countenance, while he stammered:

"I do not understand; I can not explain."

"My foot turned on a stone in the shade," interposed Jeannette, quickly. "It hurt me, and

I could not repress a cry; it is nothing more; I am even now better—I am well."

CHAPTER III. THE TEST.

THE company soon arrived in a little savage valley, separated from the sea only by a ruined cliff.

The celebrated Rocking Stone was situated on the slope of this cliff, inclosed by an iron grating, in a sort of semicircular recess, which seemed to be the work of nature. Some stones covered with moss, and without any adherence, still served as a wall in the paths where the declivity of the ground did not sufficiently protect it; but in front of the valley rose an iron inclosure, surmounted by a cross whose presence added to the melancholy character of this deserted place. The company paused, and Victor tried to turn the enormous key in the rusty lock of the gateway. While he was thus vainly employing all his strength, the assistants cast their looks eagerly across the barriers, to contemplate beforehand the marvel of Belle Isle.

The lawyer of Bristol, who arrogated the privilege of fulfilling all the functions of cicerone, continued, in the midst of the contemplation, a dissertation originally commenced at the chateau.

"Yes, gentlemen; yes, ladies; yes, girls," said he, with emphasis, "I am not of those who pretend to be able to explain everything; I am not of those incredulous spirits who would measure everything with the straight line of their intelligence; I believe, I am convinced that the pagans of old, by their intercourse with the spirits of darkness, operated some veritable prodigies, and you are soon going to witness a striking instance. Has not the Bible said, in its own peculiar phrase, that the magicians of Pharaoh accomplished the same prodigies as Moses? *Eadem portenta fecerunt*, says the text. Does not Cæsar affirm, in his Commentaries, that the fairies of Gaul had the power of rendering invisible and calming with a word the winds? I conclude, then, that the Indian soothsayers were quite able, by the magic art, *ars magica*, to construct a talisman, the virtue of which has been propagated from age to age till to-day."

"But, Mr. Brown," asked timidly, a little brunette, with a lively eye and frolicsome manners, "if this talisman is the work of a demon, is there no danger to good Christians in putting the rock to the test?"

"The expression of such a doubt is an offense to my family," exclaimed Gerald, with irony, "and I will not thus suffer our Rocking Stone to be calumniated. Do you consider what you have said, Miss —? If there had been any danger in accepting the test, would my grandmother and my other female ancestors, during I know not how many generations, have resorted hither? No, no; whatever Mr. Brown, or any other distinguished authority may say, the Rocking Stone is not a diabolical work, and to sustain such an opinion would be to make believe that one has reasons for doubting the result of experience?"

"Do you hear, ladies?" cried the lynx-eyed Anderton; "upon my word it is a challenge!"

"Well, we accept it," said Miss Brown, with an air of haughty prudery.

"We accept it," repeated the other ladies.

"All?" asked Gerald.

"All."

"Then so much the worse for those who have presumed too much of themselves!" replied he. "The rock is not gallant, I assure you; but I wash my hands of the result."

These words were pronounced with an artificial and almost feverish gayety. Gerald, since his conversation with Jeannette L'Estrange, displayed no longer that pleasantness and naturalness of manner which had theretofore characterized him. His movements were abrupt, his cheeks red, his voice altered. Evidently he had not been able to overcome the sentiment of humiliation and of rage which he had experienced on seeing his pretensions so harshly repulsed by the pretty Jeannette.

Victor had finally succeeded in turning the key in the lock, and in shaking the gate on its rusty hinges. As soon as the passage was open, the men entered the inclosure, the women followed more cautiously.

Gerald, with a smile on his lips, advanced toward the upper extremity of the rock, which was a blackish flint stone, fifteen feet long, by seven or eight in height. Our hero seemed to caress for a moment with his hand its polished surface, then, pushing without apparent effort, the stone, he communicated to it a sudden

movement, followed almost immediately by five or six slow and perfectly sensible oscillations.

Although they had been forearmed, most of the witnesses could not withhold a cry of astonishment.

The young master of Belle Isle amused himself for some minutes in accelerating the movement of the Rocking Stone. At length he moved away, saying:

"You see how docile it is. My neighbors will find it equally obliging and complaisant. They will find in experience a sure test; the stone has no occult virtue for men."

"That is to say, sir, what I do not yield," cried the notary, in an assured tone: "I can not prove by authentic and precise texts, that stones of that species serve equally to expose men who have committed some great crime; still, if the Rocking Stone has preserved its property in regard to the sins of women, why has it not also preserved it in regard to men? This is a point which must be cleared up, and I regret very much that we have not here a great criminal, a parricide for example, or even a simple assassin. I am curious to be assured."

"Your reasoning may be good, my friend," replied Prevost, with a serious air; "but we are, unfortunately, obliged to leave in suspense, for to-day, that truly interesting question. We are especially concerned with the ladies. The redoubtable moment has arrived; let the incredulous look out for themselves!"

On his recommendation the company formed a circle around the stone, at a sufficient distance not to obstruct its movements. Although few believed in the secret virtue of the talisman, most of the ladies could not avoid manifesting a sort of anxiety. They looked at one another without daring to communicate otherwise than by a glance the invincible repugnance with which that experience, so delicate in public, had inspired them. Only two of the number did not seem to share this general impression; these were Mrs. L'Estrange and Jeannette. The yellow and furrowed features of the mother expressed simply a vague curiosity. The daughter, seeking to lose herself in the crowd, sat down to one side. Her eyes, turned toward the sea, appeared to be observing with a dreamy air the waves that were breaking in silver spray against the beach.

"How calm she is!" thought Gerald. "We shall soon see how well she can preserve this superb indifference!"

The first person who presented herself to submit to the terrible test, was Miss Brown, the sister of the notary; it was she who had accepted the challenge, and this honor, therefore, belonged to her.

Hardly had she touched the stone, before the latter stirred without difficulty, and oscillated very respectfully.

"Bravo! Bravo!" cried the witnesses, clapping their hands. "The stone has said truly; honesty and purity are hereditary in the family of Squire Brown."

The ice once broken, the other ladies of the company advanced successively to try their experience. The obedient rock renewed for all its oscillations and its balancings. This trite complaisance ended by exciting the suspicions of the major portion of the assembly.

"Parbleu!" grumbled an old physician. "It is impossible that among so many women there is not at least one—my daughter, very well! but Miss —, or Miss —!—the senseless stone!"

"Decidedly," concluded an old bachelor, with a coarse smile, "your Rocking Stone; Mr. Prevost, is like my little dog, who tries to please everybody."

"Patience! gentlemen, patience!" said Gerald, biting his lips.

Mrs. L'Estrange and her daughter remained. The mother had observed, with marked curiosity, the different trials of the other ladies, but without testifying any desire to take part. As for Jeannette, still seated to one side, near the grating, she hardly turned her head, even when the gayety of her companions was at its height.

The notary endeavored to persuade Mrs. L'Estrange to imitate her companions.

"Well, neighbor," said he, "do you not wish to try your fortune? You will never have a better opportunity to prove that your husband made a good selection in taking you for his wife!"

"Faugh!" replied the old lady, with a grimace meant for a smile, "what have I to do with your jugglery? I have faith in what is true; that answers me. But to please you all, I'll do as others have done."

Placing herself before the rock, she moved it with so much vigor that the enormous block appeared almost ready to rebound to the foot of the cliff; it preserved its oscillations for more than a minute after having received the first impulse.

"All in good time!" they cried on all sides. "Honor to good merchant L'Estrange!"

The widow regained her place with a look of pride.

A moment of repose ensued the signal victory of Mrs. L'Estrange.

"One of our number has not yet submitted to the test," said a voice.

"That is Miss Jeannette L'Estrange."

"Very true; but of what use?" said Gerald, ironically.

"Jeannette is undoubtedly anxious to singularize herself!" remarked in quiet tones, a friend of Jeannette.

"Step forward, Jeannette," said the widow, in a voice of authority.

Jeannette had risen at the first appeal to her name; but, despite the precision of her mother's order, she still hesitated. The idea appeared to her ridiculous, absurd.

"So be it!" said she, at length, in a half voice. "Since all the rest have submitted, so will I."

And she advanced slowly toward the post indicated before the stone.

Every one was silent; nothing was heard but the noise of the cascade or the cries of the seabirds, which were returning to land at the approach of evening. The young woman, her eyes drooping, had yet an air of modest assurance. Drawing from her white and slender hand an elegant silk glove, she leaned with all her might against the stone. *It remained motionless.*

All those who had seen the rock repeatedly balanced at the lightest effort could not credit at first its sudden fixedness. Jeannette turned pale; but she returned to the charge, and her teeth closed tightly, while she strove to impress the block with its habitual motion. *The same negative and desperate result followed!*

Jeannette cast about her a look of anguish; raillery and wicked pleasure were written in every feature. So, laying both hands, at the same time, on the surface of the rock, she united all her strength in a supreme effort. *It would not budge.*

Jeannette uttered a cry, and her forehead was bathed with a cold sweat, as she fell swooning between the arms of the women who surrounded her.

This event threw the company into trouble and confusion. The women crowded with a hypocritical air of pity around the inanimate form of the young girl; the men no longer laughed.

Amid the general agitation, the countenance of Gerald was remarkable. He trembled and stammered; his look was wild and staring; one might reasonably have imagined he had committed a crime. As soon as Jeannette reopened her eyes, he advanced to the midst of the circle, and said, in a voice loud enough to be heard above the noise of the different conversations that were transpiring,

"My friends, my dear neighbors, listen to me, I entreat you. Do not misinterpret what has taken place here. I alone am guilty; I wished to play a joke, and I sincerely deplore the serious consequences. By means of a secret known only to myself, and which was revealed to me by my uncle, the chevalier, it is easy suddenly to arrest the motion of the Rocking Stone. There is no sorcery in the affair; let those who have already put the rock in motion again try the experiment, and they will discover their efforts useless. I declare, then, that it is I, I alone, who have done this. I humbly implore Mrs. and Miss L'Estrange to pardon my error!"

That frank and generous avowal, which had cost the pride of the young man who made it so much, was received with silent incredulity. The company were convinced that Gerald had improvised a falsehood, with the laudable purpose of diverting the ridicule or stigma that might fall on Jeannette L'Estrange.

While Gerald was speaking, the young girl, lifting sadly her head, fastened on him a look full of reproach and grief. The mother had listened with a somber air, and when she comprehended what had been done, rose with fury.

"You did that, young man!" said she. "You have made the character of my daughter the object of your jests and smiles! May the angels of heaven and the demons below punish you!"

Gerald's eyes fell before that expression of rage, so legitimate.

"Yes," said the widow, throwing around her

a look of hatred; "they are silent. But to-morrow, ay, this evening, the town will be full of scandal. They will gabble of this, and concentrate all their venom on us. Ah! young man, may punishment be visited on you, who have condemned us to this outrage! You have been heedless, proud and insolent in prosperity; may you, in turn, fall so low and become so miserable that you will be an object of compassion for even beggars! To-day you are still rich and respected; but your hour is approaching. The curse of a mother will bring you misfortune! Come, child," continued she morosely, "if you can not walk, I will even carry you. We must not remain here, where we are insulted. Alas! if your father were still living! But we shall not be the less avenged. Come!"

The company was dumb at the result of that scene. Gerald, who was the first to recover his presence of mind, said, with despair:

"Let us follow them! Do not let them depart thus! My good neighbors, assist me to calm the resentment of that poor woman. Let Miss L'Estrange again try the stone. The rock will move. It will move, I swear it!"

He darted forth himself to rejoin the mother and daughter, who were crossing a little brook, on a bridge formed by the trunk of a tree, and were moving with all their speed. Thanks to the weakness of Jeannette, he had no trouble to reach them. But at his instances and supplications, Mrs. L'Estrange responded only by a wicked silence.

"Jeannette! Dear Jeannette!" continued he. "May I not hope that you, at least—"

The young girl turned her head, and fixing on him her beautiful eyes, filled with tears, said:

"Gerald, I loved you, and you have destroyed my peace of mind."

CHAPTER IV. PUNISHMENT.

DURING the evening of the tenth day following these events, a frightful tempest broke on the shores of Belle Isle. Around the manor the elements burst furiously; the robust trees that lined the avenue bent under the effort to uproot them; and the overwhelming continual noise seemed to be an omen of ruin and approaching destruction to the old habitation.

Yet the chateau, at that advanced hour, had not the aspect of solitude and abandonment which was habitual to it. Lights gleamed from all its windows; wreaths of smoke, immediately dispersed by the wind, escaped from all its high stone chimneys. From time to time a window was opened discreetly, and a figure, with long locks and a broad hat, would advance cautiously to scrutinize the depths of the tempestuous night.

The kitchen of the chateau seemed to be the center of agitation. There, about a large fire, clustered a dozen or fifteen young fishermen, whose appearance betrayed their calling. Some were young, others old—the former preponderating; but all appeared vigorous and determined, and each bore, in addition to his picturesque local costume, an old-fashioned musket. But, what characterized still better that re-union, were the ample cockades, of rebel significance, which were attached to the straw hats.

Victor was incessantly going in and out, to bear orders, or to assure himself that those he had given were executed. He represented the supreme authority of the young master of Belle Isle, who, at the period of the opening of this chapter, had withdrawn to his chamber in the first story. The good old man's face wore an animated expression, which did not exclude an air of secret contentment and satisfied pride. That long iron rapier, which we have irreverently compared to a spit, was beating his limbs with unusual vigor; but, for the occasion, he had added to that weapon, quite formidable enough in itself, a horse-pistol of fabulous dimensions, suspended by a list-string from his left shoulder.

Despite these preparations, which were not rare nor surprising during the epoch in which these scenes are laid, the conversation was neither sad nor languishing.

"Soho! Sailor Joe," said one of his companions to a robust seaman, clad in whaler's costume, with the great boots, the large girdle, and the formidable cutlass of the profession; "then your shoulder is healed? How many tapers have you promised Saint Joseph for this miracle?"

"I have promised him one," naively responded Sailor Joe, who owed his surname to the circumstance of his having followed the sea for years, "and that is quite enough, for may I be cleaved if the cure is complete. When I move my arm, it is as if a thousand pounds of swell-

ing weighed me down; but this will amount to nothing, for the moment these devils approach, who would assassinate Mr. Prevost and burn his chateau, I will return from the other world!"

"And yet," said Aleck, a drummer, who sat shivering in a corner, "master gave thee a famous public whipping."

"Ay, ay; I can not conceal that; every one knows it," replied Joe, with a sort of pride. "But is it not a great honor that master should even have wished to wrestle with me? And, again, how he bore himself! What magnificent passes! what superb feints! There is no shame in having been thus earthed; and then, I have been paid. Look."

And he advanced his two feet, sumptuously clad in the heavy shoes that Gerald had abandoned to him after the contest.

"Our young master is generous," continued the seaman, with a smile; "such a prize is not often my lot. I know little enough of your land-lubber exercises, but I believe," added he, throwing his head back, "that if these Tory brigands should come to-night, my talent will be more useful to Mr. Prevost than all the passes and feints of the parish! But silence!" cried he, suddenly, holding his ear.

Every one was hushed with attention; yet nothing could be heard but the wailing of the wind and the beating of the rain against the slate roof.

"It is nothing," renewed Joe, after a pause; "yet I thought I could recognize the tocsin which the people of the village sound when they see the skirts of Bristol approaching the isle. It blows a hurricane, and the scoundrels would not come so early. Pass my glass, John. Aleck, my boy, what is that you were just singing?"

"A new song, called the *Rocking Stone*; it is by Anderton, the clerk of old Brown, and they no longer sing any thing else at Bristol."

And he continued his song.

They repeated the refrain in a formidable chorus, and Aleck, enchanted at his success, was about entering on a third couplet, which would have been at least more personal than those preceding, when the major-domo entered the hall in a fury.

"Blockheads! have you lost your senses?" cried he, shaking his fist at them. "What do you mean by singing such an abomination in the house of my master?"

"Listen, Master Victor," responded Aleck, wagging his head, "you should not speak too lightly of the new chant; although it may be the work of an old scrub, it is better than no song, let me tell you."

"But," replied Victor, "do you not know that this foolish rhapsody of that backbiter, Anderton, is precisely the cause of all the dangers that menace us at this moment? That song is a cowardly drive at Miss L'Estrange, who is seriously ill in consequence, and her old fool of a mother, in order to avenge herself on our master, whom she accuses of being the author of her sorrows and misfortunes, has enlisted against us all the bullies of the coast."

"Hold!" said one of the party. "It is not, then, because our young master is of French descent, and in sympathy with the colonists that they dislike him so much?"

"There is a little politics and something besides in this affair," replied Victor; "but if my master, who is writing in his chamber beyond, had heard your raileries, he would never have pardoned them."

Saying this, he left the apartment to rejoin Gerald, leaving the defenders of the chateau to discuss, in a low voice, the evils which the immobility of the famous stone announced.

Gerald was alone in his vast chamber, filled with its heavy tapestries and its old oak-wood furniture. On a table with crooked feet, where two tapers were burning, lay several letters sealed with red wax stamped with the Prevost arms. The young man was walking sadly and pensively back and forth, pausing at intervals to listen to the distant rocking of the sea. He was completely equipped, with sword at side; a pair of pistols reposed with his gloves and hat on a table near the door.

"Well, Victor, what news?" asked he, with a distracted air, before the intendant had achieved his profound and methodical salute.

"All is going well, master; our people are ready and very resolute; arms and munitions will not be wanting. We are sure of victory. And that silly custom's officer, who believes the family of Prevost without influence or power—he will see, by St. Peter, he will see!"

And the old man clapped his hands together. Gerald, meanwhile, had hardly heard him.

"Victor," replied he, in a low voice, "have you heard nothing yet from the poor girl? You

announced to me yesterday that she was quite ill, and I am mortally disturbed."

"Nothing, Master Gerald," replied Victor, with an expression of humor; "verily, since yesterday I have had more important duties than to think of the health of a jade."

"Be careful, Victor!" cried Gerald. "If you respect me, do not speak thus of that unhappy girl, whose sufferings are my work!"

The old man shook his head.

"I will speak as you wish, master," replied he; "but you are absolutely persuaded, then, that it is your fault the stone was not complaisant for Miss L'Estrange?"

"It is the truth, the pure truth, Victor; and my conscience orders me to proclaim it aloud. Who could have foreseen that a joke would result so seriously? Yes, it is I who, abusing, in a miserable spirit of vengeance, a family secret, made the talisman fail, and subjected a lovely girl to ridicule."

"Well, well, master, you are an honest and generous young man; but what must one think of that explanation? As for me, although I have had the honor of serving the family of Prevost since my birth, I have never heard mentioned that secret to which you make allusion; and if you will not at least show by what means you could thus fix the magic stone, I can not allow myself—"

"It is defended by my oath," said Gerald; "but it matters nothing! A frivolous tradition can not prevail, when it concerns position and perhaps life. I will endeavor, anon, to give a sure proof. Alas! am I not sufficiently punished for a schoolboy's trick! And must I now suffer blood to flow, that families may be plunged into grief to expiate my wrong-doings?"

Victor was moved by this touching plaint.

"Go to, my excellent master!" replied he, in an encouraging tone; "you must not be affected thus at trifles. Miss L'Estrange is not the first young lady who has been the victim of a jest. As for a siege! It will be splendid to consign to the records of your family!"

Gerald placed his hand on the shoulder of his faithful servitor.

"My poor Victor, do not wish the sad struggle to commence," sighed he. "The result would not be as promising to-day as the glory and fortune of the name I bear! I have lost my confidence in the future; the saddest presentiments overwhelm me. The malediction that offended mother has pronounced against me, incessantly occupies my mind, and it already seems to me I am experiencing its effects."

"Can you still be thinking of the ravings of an old fool?" replied Victor, with warmth. "This is pure childishness. Come, master, recover yourself; be lively, heedless, joyous as before. But, I see, like all young men, you do not know how to support solitude; descend with me, and you will see how well our boys are prepared for battle; that will distract you."

Gerald took his arms and hat, and followed Victor, who carried a torch to light his way.

On beholding him, the tenants and fishermen clustered in the kitchen of the old manor rose with respect. He thanked them in a few words for their devotion; then, addressing himself to each of them in person, he conversed amicably of their affairs and their interests. His conversation finished, he seated himself in the corner of the fireplace, in a great wooden arm-chair, where, leaning his head upon his hands, he fell into a fit of despondency. His tenants at length believed him sleeping, although his fixed and large opened eyes reflected a flame of fire.

Once, however, he abandoned his reverie. An old man, bearing the aspect of a fisherman, was re-entering, after long sentry-duty, the outer door; he approached the fire to dry his garments, which were drenched with rain.

"My brave Peter," asked Prevost, moving to make place for him, "where is your bark at this moment?"

"Not very far off, master; I was going out to-day to drag for oysters, when they came to apprise me that the people from the other side were going to make a descent upon you; then I threw the grapnel into the creek leading from the little bay, before the Rocking Stone."

"Well, Peter," replied Gerald, lowering his voice, "what would you say if I should propose to put to sea and to sail southward?"

"Hum! master! the sea is in a terrible fury. Then, I have neither provisions nor men on board the *Ariel*."

"Two solid men, with you, will be enough—"

"It is necessary, then, that they and I should sacrifice our lives—"

"If it was for me?"

"For you, master," replied the fisherman,

awakening with vivacity; "if this is for you, the thing is possible; the bark and the master, are all yours. John and Sailor Joe would ask for nothing better than to follow me. Come, shall we break her moorings?"

Gerald answered the brave man only by a shake of the hand.

Most of the assistants were sleeping on the naked flag-stones, in the midst of the comparative silence that had succeeded the fracas of the hurricane, when the slow and lugubrious striking of the village clock resounded in the distance. The sleepers awoke.

"This is the tocsin! Holy Virgin! This is the tocsin!" cried Sailor Joe, shaking himself as if for the approaching combat.

"Yes, yes, it is they! They are coming!" was the cry from all parts.

They rose, and hurriedly seized their guns.

Gerald, the leader, who was standing, bore in hand his pistols; but all his demonstrations of resistance ended there. He became a prey to grievous irresolution. Victor ran to him.

"What are the orders of Master Gerald?" inquired he, with ill-concealed ardor.

Gerald did not respond for a moment.

"What shall we do?" said he at length, as if he were speaking to himself. "Must I let so many people be destroyed for my folly? Yet I am right in legitimately defending myself. Again, is not my cause to become that of a people struggling against British intolerance? Be it so, my friends," added he, in a firm tone, addressing his partisans; "let each man repair to the post which has been assigned him. Only, remember my recommendations. Do not let us strike the first blow; let us be content to defend ourselves. To your posts, then, and success to our cause."

"Success to our cause! Success to our good master, Prevost!" cried the assistants, waving their hats, with white cockades.

They were about going out, when a woman of coarse form, bronze features, callous hands, and clad in dirty tarpaulin, was introduced. She was wrapped in a red cloth cloak which shed the water.

"This is mother Geary herself," muttered several voices.

"Well! yes, it is myself," replied the rough woman, in an undertone. "Good-day, boys; good-day, my good master. What a beautiful hour and a splendid night for an honest woman to be running about! But it is necessary, for so pretty a young master, to risk something."

"Be seated, good mother," said Gerald, without appearing offended at the familiarity, "you appear quite fatigued."

"Me seated!" repeated the woman. "You do not know then what is brewing below? You have not heard the clock? The people of the other side will soon be here!"

"Have you seen them, mother Geary?", asked Gerald.

"Have I seen them! I was below there at the St. Thomas drinking with the others who did not distrust me. Toward four o'clock in the morning, the widow L'Estrange herself roughly entered the St. Thomas. 'It is time; it is time!' cried she. 'Let us go; the old followers of the *Sea Dog* must avenge the daughter and widow of their captain!' Immediately all my companions commenced shaking themselves. But I, more active than they, glided into the obscurity, ran to the place where I left my long-boat, and shot into the channel with my oars, although the sea was terribly rough. More than once the waves almost got the start of me, for the night was dark; but I said, 'this is for Master Gerald, and I must succeed.' At the moment I entered to give the alarm in the village, more than twenty great skiffs were crossing the channel. Ho, ho!" laughed the old woman, "to think that all this rumpus comes of a joke! The widow is constantly crying aloud, that it was you who killed Jeannette!"

"Jeannette," repeated Gerald; "but Jeannette is living!"

"She died during the night they were singing under her window that song of the clock; you know it."

And the woman chanted, in a rank and discordant voice, the satirical verse that referred particularly to Jeannette.

Victor interrupted her and imposed silence with a threatening gesture; Gerald appeared struck as if by a thunderbolt.

"Dead! Jeannette L'Estrange!" stammered he. "Is it possible?"

The young man fell back in a seat, and his pistols escaped from his hands.

"It is I who have killed her!" murmured he.

Then, concealing his features, he succeeded in stifling his convulsive sobs.

"Master Gerald, my excellent master," at length said Victor, in a low voice, "recollect that they are looking at you and that they may ill interpret this weakness."

Gerald, trembling, passed his hand over his forehead, and arose.

"My friends," said he in a firm tone, although his features were still disturbed by a piercing emotion, "I have reflected, and decidedly I will not suffer you to peril your lives against these people, maddened and ten times more numerous than you. Even in case we should succeed in repelling the attack, it will serve as a pretext for dislikes and vengeance of which you must become the victims. Let my fate be accomplished; I have perhaps merited it, and my conscience prevents my engaging in that impious strife; they will now only worst themselves."

"But then, master," cried Victor, "they will pitilessly murder you."

"I have foreseen that," said Gerald, with a bitter smile, "and I will not await them. Peter," continued he, addressing the old fisherman, "go and prepare your bark. In five minutes I shall be with you; one of our boys will accompany us."

"That will be me, master; that will be me!" exclaimed all the aspirants.

Gerald thanked them with a grateful sign.

"Sailor Joe will suffice," said he, "if he is willing to maneuver the bark; I owe him atonement for having so ill-treated him a few days since."

"But his wound!" said Peter.

"My wound!" cried Joe, snapping his fingers; "that for my wound! May St. John assist you, master; you will see how we shall manage the *Ariel*!"

"But Joe and I will not suffice," said Peter, "if, as I presume, we must push to sea southward; we must have a third to—"

"The third will be myself," said Gerald. "Go quickly, time presses."

Peter and his companions rushed out precipitately.

"Master, master," replied Victor, with despair, "you depart when the enemy approaches; they will say that you are afraid."

"If I thought it," said the young man, closing his fingers; "but no, no, Victor, they know very well that a Prevost cannot be a coward. Let us go; the die is cast. Let my friends," continued he, turning toward the consternated assistants, "open the gates and disperse without delay. Receive my adieux. I leave my modest possessions to your care, Victor," added he, presenting the old man with the letters he had written during the preceding evening. "Here are the preparations I have made in anticipation of what is happening; one is a power of attorney, to manage and administer my affairs; the other is my will. You will confide these instruments to the care of Brown, the notary, who will direct you according to their contents. Although he may be timid and irresolute and cautious, I have faith in his probity, and in his gratitude to my family, who have done him many a good service. If I never return," added he, in an altered tone, "I rely on your watching the religious observance of my last wishes."

"Oh, you will return, master," cried the good man with a look full of grief; "what would I do in the world if you should not return? When the storm is past you will find here, in your Belle Isle, many long and peaceful days."

"Let us hope that this return will take place, and that it may be near," responded Gerald. "Embrace me, Victor, embrace me, also, my old Julia, and think of me sometimes when all the rest have forgotten me."

The two old servitors folded him in their arms, weeping.

"Master! my child," said Julia, in a broken voice, "I have prayed that you might never quit us till your last day; but the saints have not answered my prayer. Alas! the Rocking Stone had predicted this misfortune!"

This mention of the Rocking Stone threw a sudden shadow over the countenance of our hero. The young man was about to respond when a distant tumult, mingled with furious cries, rose in the midst of the silence of the night.

The young man, with a solemn gesture, pointed to heaven and disappeared.

Five minutes after, the little manor resounded with cries and imprecations.

At the same instant a bark was silently gliding from the bay out upon the high sea, despite the continued agitation of the waves.

A man, standing at the stern, was looking at the land which was gradually disappearing in the mist. At intervals ferocious elamors and maledictions reached him, despite the moaning

of the waters. Suddenly a vivid and brilliant flame shot up in the direction of the chateau, like a sinister phantom. The devastators had piled in a huge heap the furniture of the little manor, and having set fire thereto were dancing round the blaze, and uttering cries of furious joy.

It was by the light of that incendiarism, of which the brilliant reflection shone out upon the waters, that Gerald Prevost quitted, as a fugitive, the domain of his ancestors. Alone, with two poor fishermen for his companions, without money, provisions or baggage, he was abandoning his home in a frail bark, which it seemed momentarily would become submerged under the monstrous asperities of the ocean.

CHAPTER V.

THE STRANGER.

THE war of '76 had closed. At the moment we renew this history, America, relieved from her seven years of martial strife, had achieved her independence, and was now occupied in debating how best to preserve the political advantages bequeathed by our revolutionary fathers. Though local hatreds remained, in many instances intense, all sections of the commonwealth recognized the established order of events, and the proscribed of all shades and differences were countenanced, so long as they concealed their Tory sympathies by submitting to the new ordination.

At noon, during a magnificent spring day, an old man was reposing in solitude on the sea-coast, at the northern extremity of Belle Isle, not far from the Rocking Stone. Behind him stretched the verdant and smiling island, with its fresh fields, its oak groves, its plantations, its Indian monuments, clad with moss and ivy, its white strands, alive with oystermen and birds of motley plumage. Before him the sea, immense and majestic, though calm, reflected an azure heaven and a glorious sun.

At length, the eye of the old man, which had hitherto wandered distractedly, became fixed on the coast. The barks, with their white sails, that were riding so peaceably through the waves a moment before, were flying in different directions and with all possible speed. The cause of their sudden terror seemed to be a distant ship, of which the high sails could only be perceived. Nevertheless, one could already judge that, without having the dimensions of a vessel of war, even of the smallest kind, it was near enough like one to frighten the peaceful fishing-smacks.

"Humph! humph!" grumbled the old man, "is it an English man-of-war that would dare ride so near our coasts? See the people of Bristol running away—the poltroons, formerly the worst Tories themselves! The English do not appear to be very fearful, though. If they only had the heart—if they would only punish their own friends, to whom we owe the devastation of our young master's dwelling!"

Meanwhile, the scene had completely changed. The ship, of which one could now distinguish the massive dimensions, was about lying to and hoisting the Spanish colors. The barks had ceased their flight and resumed their peaceable and careless occupation. A long-boat, detaching itself from the anchored vessel, was directed toward the outlet of the river with all the impetus that four vigorous oarsmen could give it.

"Bah! this is not an enemy," soliloquized the observer, in whom the reader has undoubtedly already recognized Victor, the old intendant of Gerald; "but, then, what can bring that honest Spanish merchantman to Belle Isle? Bah! what matters it to me?" continued he, with a bitter accent. "I no longer care anything for this world, and I am little disturbed by passing events."

Yet, in spite of himself, the old man followed attentively the progress of the small boat which was gradually approaching the creek.

Victor differed little from what we beheld him at the beginning of this narrative, except that a tinge of melancholy had invaded his countenance, the furrows of which were more numerous and deeper than formerly. His long hair was entirely bleached; his erect stature was bowed, and everything in his appearance announced approaching decrepitude.

He had assumed a position in the shade of two or three trees which rose near the mouth of the river, whence he could easily observe the foreigners without being himself remarked. The debarkation seemed to be nothing more than the launch of a modest merchantman's long-boat. In addition to the four oarsmen, of whom we have spoken, a man in the costume of a sailor was seated in the stern and held the rudder; but no officer could be seen on board, nor any mer-

chandise, nor any signals, and the mission of the long-boat on that solitary coast, and without resources, could not yet be explained in a satisfactory manner.

The bark soon touched the shore; the sailor at the helm arose, covered his head with an old cap, and, taking from the seat at his side a little packet wrapped in a handkerchief, prepared to land. But, before moving, he shook hands with each of the rowers and appeared to be saying his adieux. His companions returned his marks of affection with an air of sadness—almost of respect; then the sailor leaped with an effort the space which separated him from a sand-bank, then dry, and while he again addressed those who had brought him a few words of adieu, the boat, leaving him upon the shore, resumed, without delay, its route on the high sea.

Victor did not press forward to show himself. The stranger remained motionless on the beach, with his modest packet in hand.

He was a man still young, but of whom fatigue and suffering appeared to have prematurely destroyed the vigor. His forehead was devoid of hair; his complexion had a sickly pallor, which was set off still more by his thick, dark beard. His heavy sailor's costume was in a state of dilapidation, calling for pity. Nevertheless, there was in the manner in which he wore these wretched vestments something noble and dignified, which prevented his being abased by them. His entire person betrayed misery and despair.

At the noise which Victor made in approaching, the voyager passed his hand rapidly over his face; then he turned toward him. Hardly had he beheld the features of the old intendant when his emotion appeared to increase; he blushed and became pale by turns; but he did not pronounce a word.

Victor did not remark this agitation caused by his presence.

"My friend," said he, mildly, "this place is undoubtedly new to you. Do you seek some one?"

"I seek no one," replied the unknown, in a sad voice, lowering his head.

The honest old man felt a violent commotion in his breast; the sound of that voice recalled to him a cherished accent, which many years of separation had been unable to efface from his memory.

"May Our Lady assist me!" murmured he, fixing on the traveler an ardent look; "I would have believed at first—it seemed to me—but no, no; the dead do not redescend to earth to frighten the living!"

The unknown preserved silence.

"You appear to have come from a distance?" continued Victor.

"From Vera Cruz, where I sojourned on quitting—"

He stopped abruptly.

"If you come from Mexico, tell me if you have never heard mention of my former master, Gerald Prevost, from whom we have received no tidings for over seven years?"

Victor awaited with a lively anxiety the response of the unknown; the latter appeared to hesitate what he should say.

"When one would be informed of those who withdraw to foreign soil to avoid a revolution in their own," at length replied the stranger, "he must expect to learn of cruel misfortunes. I have heard, indeed, of a person who bore the name of Prevost; this was a young man who gave fencing-lessons for a living to the Spanish youth of Vera Cruz. He lived in comparative misery and seclusion—"

"This can not be he!" cried Victor; "he, the eldest and heir of a good family, reduced to such a condition! But why not?" he continued, with bitterness, after a moment's reflection. "He was without resources, and he would not—in pity's name, sir, tell me all you know of my unhappy master! What became of him? Is he still living?"

"I know that, worn out by fatigue and privation, he fell ill, and was transported to the All Saints' Hospital, at Vera Cruz; it is a miracle if he could resist so many and such terrible trials."

"So it is true, then, that he is dead!" said the old man, bearing his hand to his forehead; "in spite of myself, I would still preserve a little hope. Yet, why doubt longer? I shall never again see him! My good master, my child, I shall never more see you! God have pity on him! Saint Peter pray for him!"

And the good man seated himself on the river's bank, half-choked with sobs.

"Courage, friend," replied the voyager; "if your master should still be living, a victim to

hunger, cold, abandonment, then only would it be necessary to weep over and pity him; but, death is the end of all our ills; it should not leave regrets when it strikes a wretch who has been overwhelmed with human griefs."

Victor at length succeeded in subduing his emotion.

"You are, perhaps, right," replied he; "for it would be better for a Prevost to be entombed than live in a condition unworthy his name and his race. This was once a great and proud family, which never hesitated in its choice between a dishonorable act and a glorious death. But, sad as are your tidings and consolations, I thank you; although you seem a little strange, your voice recalls to me— But let us go! This is a fantasy; but if poor Victor could render you a service, he would do it with good heart. Where do you propose going?"

The unknown named, as if at hazard, a little port of the vicinity.

"You are still very far," replied Victor, "and you do not appear to me to be a great walker. Again, you are pale and you seem ill; hold! your hand trembles!" (The old man had seized the hand of the poor stranger.) "Your teeth chatter as if you had a chill."

"It is true," replied the unknown, with an effort. "I am tormented with an intermittent fever, which I acquired in the dews of Mexico. It had almost disappeared during my stay on shipboard; but the fatigues of the last journey have made it reappear with new force. My emotion in setting foot on my native soil, which I left so many years ago, has perhaps determined a new crisis. I certainly feel uneasy; I am dizzy, shivering; I must hasten to Bristol, where I may find aid."

"Bristol!" repeated Victor, with a sort of indignation. "Bristol! That nest of Tory descendants and abomination! Come!" added he, in a cordial tone, "You have the air of an honest youth, though a little odd, and then you have some religion; you have furnished me some tidings of my master, and though they may be bad I owe you not the less an acknowledgment. We will ask you nothing in return, Julia and I, to whom you can relate what you know of our dear master, for Julia also loved him very much, poor old woman! Come; let me lead you."

The traveler seemed undetermined how to receive that proposition.

"Excuse me," replied he; "I possibly appear foolish to you, but if you knew with what rough and sudden changes, with what strange contrasts my life has been filled! Yet, do not imagine that I refuse your offer; I am not in the habit of disdaining the pity of any one; I will follow you to the chateau of Belle Isle, and will accept your hospitality."

The old man picked up his baton, and took a little path, which, winding across the valley, directed him toward that portion of the isle where the habitations rose; but, after a few steps, he perceived that the unknown had difficulty to follow him.

"Give me this packet you carry," said he, taking from him the wretched handkerchief, which contained the baggage of his guest. "Lean on me. Although my arm has not its former vigor, it may still be of some service."

"Thanks, Victor," sighed the unknown, whose head already swayed on his shoulders; "you have always been honest and good!"

"Victor!" repeated the intendant, with surprise. "How did you know my name? Who told you—"

"Did you not pronounce it a moment since, yourself?"

"You are right. I had forgotten it. May St. Victor protect me! I am losing both reason and memory."

When they had turned the point of the cliff, where the cascade plunges, the old Frenchman felt the arm of his companion resist their progress, and his limbs became stiff and rigid.

"The Rocking Stone!" stammered the unknown, in a husky voice. "This is the Rocking Stone!"

They stood, in fact, before this celebrated monument of Belle Isle.

The rock had survived human revolutions as well as those of nature; but the inclosure that formerly surrounded it had been destroyed. Every thing bore witness to a barbarous vandalism, to an implacable desire for the destruction of all that surrounded this venerable relic.

"You know our Rocking Stone?" asked Victor, with a new expression of astonishment and defiance. "How is that, if you have never been here?"

The stranger made a strong effort before he could answer distinctly.

"I have told you I was born on yonder coast. Are not the sailors hereabout in the habit of showing afar off the Rocking Stone, when they pass in view of Belle Isle?"

"That is true," replied the old man, striking the earth with his staff, "and if my poor brain had not been suddenly turned, I would have remembered. Well, yes," added he, with a marked expression of melancholy complaisance, "look at your ease; this is the stone of which they speak so often, and to which they say is attached the lot of the old family. Since the war first broke on this country, and my master's flight, it has remained motionless, and Julia assures me that this is a sign of heavenly wrath."

"A short time after the departure of our young master," he continued, "there arrived here more than two hundred Tory plunderers and contrabandists, 'to put an end,' in their own language, 'to the superstitions of the Rocking Stone.' So they surrounded the rock with cables, to which they attached a score of horses; though the latter pulled with all their strength, they could not succeed in moving it. They labored to no purpose for an entire day; men and beasts exhausted their breath in the effort. Obligated to renounce their project, the devastators withdrew, promising to return on the morrow with powder and miners, to blow up the rock. But, Heaven was undoubtedly watching for its preservation; on the morrow, the furious woman who had ordered these violences, did not observe the word she had pledged to come back and accomplish the work; they were delayed, therefore, in destroying the Rocking Stone. The widow L'Estrange, after having caused all the evil she could on the island, withdrew to New York, where she died five or six years after, they assure us, while it was yet in the hands of the British."

While Victor was speaking, the stranger seemed absorbed in his own reflections.

"It is there the fault was committed," murmured he, in an inarticulate tone. "It is there the curse was pronounced. God has answered the imprecations of an offended mother. Alas, yes! it was necessary to avenge that holy victim of an idle jest; that beautiful girl, so noble and so good!"

And a tear rolled down his cheek.

Victor had not caught his words, but this sign of emotion did not escape him.

"You have a good heart, my friend," said he, "that you thus take part in the misfortunes of a family you never knew. But, let us go! If your strength should fail, I would not know how to carry you to the chateau."

"Yes, yes, lead me on," said the unknown, leaning heavily on the arm of his guide.

He advanced with a sort of impatient precipitation, his intellectual faculties vividly over-excited, still struggling desperately against the fever that was gaining on him. The moment he was about entering the plantations, he remarked a number of fields, covered with harvests, in a place where, from time immemorial, had only existed furze and heather.

"Who has done this?" exclaimed he, with an effort, extending his hand toward these richly-cultivated fields.

"Ah, ah! then you must have been formerly at Belle Isle to remark these changes!" queried Victor, with surprise. "Well, you would see many other innovations, if you could walk a little over our lands. They wished every foot to be *productive*, as they say, the misers! I tell you they would have cultivated the place, to the very court-yards of the manor if they had dared. As to the chateau, I admit it has been very well repaired, as it had need to be. If you could see the substitute they have placed in the parlors, for the massive and splendid old furniture of dark oak which was demolished or burned at the departure of Master Gerald! Gilded furniture, my boy, of silken material, ornamented with great flowers—perhaps to humiliate the old family to which the others belonged."

The good man, carried away by the pleasure of narrating—a mania quite frequent with old men who live in solitude—had forgotten to whom he was speaking. The stranger, nevertheless, listened with a lively interest to these details so trifling in appearance.

"And your master? Who is he? You have not yet given me the name of the new proprietor of Belle Isle."

Victor smiled ironically.

"The actual master of Belle Isle, my boy?" replied he. "Ah! indeed! you are curious to know who could have acquired the domain of the Prevosts, who has cultivated these lands and heather, who has constructed those beautiful

farms there below on the border of the sea, who has repaired the manor, and incumbered it with precious furniture, to render it undoubtedly worthy of him?"

The traveler sadly bowed his head, as if to say nothing could astonish him.

"You would, perhaps, suppose," continued Victor, in the same sarcastic tone, "that this opulent proprietor is of good family, or a stanch Whig? Nothing of the kind, my boy; the owner of Belle Isle is a poor, petty lawyer, a village scribe, with hooked fingers, smeared with ink—Mr. Brown, the notary of Bristol."

And he smiled again.

"Brown?" repeated the unknown.

"Yes, Brown, an old magistrate's clerk, who owes ever so much to the patronage of the Chevalier Prevost; Brown, who has usurped the confidence of the family, and whom my master himself, on leaving home, named his mandatory; it is he who has accomplished here so many marvelous changes; it is he who has despoiled the old house of which he was the servitor, though he has insinuated to different persons, to me in particular, that in making such acquisitions, he was acting on account of another."

"Well! and you, Victor?" asked the unknown.

"How have you been treated by Brown?"

"Not ill, my boy," replied the good man, with an air of regret; "and that is the deuce of it; I am angry that I can reproach him for nothing in what concerns me. Julia and I are sole guardians of the chateau; they furnish us there with all the necessaries, and pay us exactly our wages, as if our task had been laborious."

"But have you seen this unknown master of whom he speaks?"

"Never—since the chateau has been repaired, they have often announced to us his approaching visit, recommending us to put everything in readiness for his reception; but no one has come. A few days since, we received an order to prepare the apartments; but it will be now as heretofore, and I shall not complain."

During the above conversation, they had crossed the oak grove, which had been religiously respected, and had arrived before the chateau.

Immediately the unknown roughly disengaged himself, and ran weeping toward the manor. He rapidly mounted the little flight of steps which preceded its principal entrance. Arrived at the summit, he threw himself on his knees, his hands and eyes raised toward heaven, as if to pray. But, at the same instant, thrown to the ground by the triple action of the fever, fatigue and emotion, he fell forward, uttering a deep groan.

CHAPTER VI.

DELIRIUM.

In answer to the cries of Victor, the aged Julia ran from the end of the kitchen, passing her distaff through her apron-band. On perceiving the human body extended at her feet, she could not restrain a movement of alarm.

The two old domestics succeeded, with difficulty, in transporting the stranger to the kitchen, and placing him in an arm-chair near the fire, while another arm-chair was brought forward to sustain his limbs.

"And now," said Victor, "give him a few swallows of your elixir, so renowned in curing feebleness and fainting; then go and prepare a bed."

"I would, Mr. Victor; but, if any one should arrive, as they are likely to, at any time, how should we announce him?"

"Never mind, never mind, Julia! Those who have the means should be charitable. But let us consider. Why not install him in my chamber? The crisis will be over to-morrow, and then we can deliberate how better to arrange him."

The servant, without further observation, advanced toward a dresser, where she kept her provisions, and took therefrom a stone bottle, which contained the sovereign elixir, of which the recipe was one of the treasures which the poor old woman calculated leaving to her heirs.

A dog, however, decrepit, entirely bald and almost blind, who was sleeping in a corner of the fireplace, his ordinary retreat, had for some moments been giving evidence of uneasiness.

The agitation of the animal appeared to increase, from minute to minute. He directed his ternate and glassy, though still intelligent eyes toward the unknown, and commenced barking. He forced himself, with an effort, on his feeble limbs, and dragged himself forward on his belly, wagging his tail; his lean and emaciated body appeared to be trembling with joy. Arrived near the stranger, he commenced lick-

ing one of his hands, which was falling cold and inert along a leg of the chair, and strove to leap; but he only succeeded in turning a few convulsive summersets, repeating his growls.

Victor beheld, distractedly, these strange demonstrations, when Julia returned, holding in her hand a glass, into which she had poured a few swallows of the precious fluid. She watched the dog, then the stranger, of whom a bright ray, entering the window, lit up the features; suddenly, she let fall the glass, which was broken on the flag-stones into a thousand fragments.

"Victor," said she, in a subdued and penetrating voice, "you have brought to this house the very one who has the right to enter it. It is he; it is, indeed, he!"

"What would you say? Of whom do you speak?" asked Victor.

"It is Master Gerald, I tell you. Neither you nor I have recognized him; but his dog has not been deceived. Look!"

And she ran to kneel before a little Madonna of plaster, which ornamented a corner of the kitchen.

Victor remained bending over the stranger. His mind was too determined, and his memory was too sure for him to be able to recognize, in this unfortunate outcast, with bald forehead, wan features and ragged garments, the young master, so brilliant and so gay, of Belle Isle. From time to time, he struck his foot against the floor, obstinately repeating:

"It is impossible! It is impossible!"

Meanwhile, the sick man seemed to be recovering, little by little, from his prostration. He muttered a few incoherent words. Julia and Victor established themselves on either side of the arm-chair, watching with anxiety the first sign of intelligence. His words soon became more distinct, and his eyes reopened; but, the poor voyager had not recovered his reason. He was evidently a prey to the delirium of fever, and he shook as under the load of a nightmare.

"Victor," said he, rolling his wild eyes, "has my uncle inquired after me while I was hunting? I have had extraordinary luck with this wild fowl, my dear Julia; do not grumble, therefore, if I am a little muddy. But my uncle has called for me; I tell you the chevalier is worried at my absence; I shall instantly go up; take my gun, Victor. Take care of poor Jack, Julia; the honest dog has earned his salt. But I cannot present myself before my uncle in this hunting suit; my dress suit, Victor; quick; my uncle is impatient! Here I am, uncle; I am coming!"

The ravings of the traveler had a significance too precise to be misinterpreted. The two old servitors had fallen on their knees and bathed his hands with their tears.

"Yes; it is he; it is truly he!" stammered Victor, transported. "Master Gerald, my beloved master; pardon my not having known you!"

"Our Holy Mother herself would be deceived, he has changed so much!" said Julia.

Gerald Prevost—for we must hereafter call him by that name—received these caresses with extreme astonishment. He regarded, one after the other, Victor and Julia, and then dropped his head. Victor was about to speak to him, when the old cook exclaimed.

"Be quiet, do! Our presence annoys him and increases his delirium; let him rest a minute."

They were silent, and the sick man fell again under the influence of his hallucinations.

"I have deserved all that," continued he, mournfully, making the ill-jointed rungs of his arm-chair creak. "All that is the result of the curse pronounced before the Rocking Stone. The old mother is dead, you say? What matters that, if her curse survives? I repeat it, I have merited all my suffering; was it not necessary to avenge the poor girl? Outrageous joke! The unfortunate child is dead, and they chanted around her grave their infernal song—you remember it? I will kill this Anderton!" he cried. "Yes, I will kill him! but, fudge! he is a coward. She is dead, then—my Jeannette! I have deserved my lot; I will not complain. Jeannette, angel of heaven, I do not accuse you; I have never murmured against you, or against your mother, who cursed me! Must I also die to deserve your pardon?"

His ideas grew more and more confused; then his voice suddenly became hushed.

"Great God!" cried Victor, "can he be dead? Is he already—"

"No, no," replied Julia, who was more practical, "this is the ordinary result of these violent fevers; the greatest force of the crisis has passed. Well, Mr. Victor, what shall we now do? Master Gerald must be carried to a bed."

"That is what I am going to do, Julia."

"What! in your chamber?"

"No, indeed; no, indeed. Above, in the principal chamber, on that beautiful bed of satin and down."

"But you forget;—if the other should arrive?"

"I know of no other proprietor of the chateau of Belle Isle than Master Gerald Prevost," replied Victor, with great vehemence. "The owner of this property has returned; we must obey only him."

"Very well, Mr. Victor," responded the old woman, with zeal. "I was present at his birth, and it is not for me to refuse obedience. Yet, reflect a little; if that one of Bristol should be offended and attempt to drive our master—"

"Drive him—he!" cried the major-domo, his eyes sparkling with joy. "Drive Master Gerald from his own house! I would they might dare to try it, Julia: yes, I wish, for the time that is left me to live in, that they would attempt such an infamy. In a quarter of an hour, I would have excited the indignation of the island—of the entire country, in fact, and this time they would be resolutely resisted. Go to, go to; there are many about us who, since the Revolution, have repented of having abandoned their old landlord, as during that terrible night of which we have so many times spoken, and they have sworn to me that if he should return—but enough; we have still here Sailor Joe, Aleck, old Peter, John and a host of others who may be relied on for the good cause; they would not budge from their posts, if summoned to defend Master Gerald, and we might sustain a siege, a genuine siege, of which they would talk all over the country; it is I who tell you this."

And he clapped his hands.

Julia was too simple, and she had too lofty an idea of her superior, to comprehend any absurdity to exist in such a project. She never doubted for a moment that the sailors and fishermen of Belle Isle were in a condition to vanquish all the armies of christendom, since *Mister Victor* affirmed it; and she interposed no objection.

Gerald Prevost was installed in that chamber of honor, which he once had so long occupied. But how changed it was! In place of the modest tapestry and furniture that formerly decorated it, everywhere appeared precious hangings, mirrors and gildings. Heavy velvet curtains, sustained by silken cords, let only a half-light penetrate this sumptuous apartment. In an open alcove, on a mahogany bedstead, richly incrustated, might have been seen the pale features of the last of the Prevosts, reposing under sumptuous coverlets. A cambric night-shirt, with muslin frills, replaced the coarse linen which had so greatly shocked the good Victor; all traces of the frightful misery in which the stranger had disembarked at Belle Isle had disappeared. The proud servitor had taken pains to carefully hide the stiff shoes, the old cap, and the ragged woolen jacket. In their place he had thrown over a seat, at the foot of the bed, a vest and breeches of embroidered satin, silk stockings, a velvet frock, and pumps with gold buckles—luxuries somewhat obsolete, and ill adapted to a poor exile returning home, but which, according to the ideas of the old domestics, were alone worthy of Master Gerald.

Victor and Julia were walking carefully over the tapestry carpet that covered the floor, and attentively watching the wants of their master. They spoke only in a low voice; no other noise could be heard than the slight tinkling of a silver spoon against a china bowl, when Julia poured a few swallows of her potion between the brimming lips of the sick man.

Thus things continued until near sunset. The respiration of Gerald was regular and his sleep tranquil. Suddenly a violent stroke of the bell resounded in the hall.

Julia turned pale; Victor made a movement of surprise and fear; they both looked at each other in silence.

"They have rung the bell, Julia," at length said the intendant, in a choked voice.

"Yes, yes; they have surely rung, Mr. Victor."

And neither of them stirred.

"You—you do not guess who this can be, Julia?"

"I do not know—that is to say, perhaps—"

Here a new stroke of the bell, louder and more precipitate than the first, ensued. The sick man moved on his couch, while Jack angrily growled.

"Does it not seem, Julia," said Victor with a bitter smile, "that this sound may be that of the master?"

Julia did not reply, but approached the window that looked out upon the court. After a

few seconds' observation, she returned in a flurry.

"You are right," said she. "What shall we do? May Our Good Lady aid us!"

Victor advanced, in his turn, to examine a group of persons stopping before the gate. There was, first, the notary, Brown, very easily recognized from his tall stature and his dark costume. He carried under his arm a great bunch of papers, and appeared very much irritated at the delay in opening to him. Near him stood a lady of elegant appearance, whose features and figure were partially concealed by a deeply-embroidered veil. She was speaking in a low tone to the notary, and seemed to be softly tinging his patience. Behind these principal personages, a man having the appearance of a domestic, bore a number of portfolios and packages.

His investigation ended, Victor turned on his heel, whistling with an air of determination and spite. His look encountered that of poor Julia, all mute and trembling.

Julia was going to propose some method of conciliation and pacification, when the bell was pulled vehemently and repeatedly, while a shrill voice at the same time echoed the appeal.

The sick man turned on his bed, and feebly groaned.

"This numskull is going to awaken master!" said Victor, angrily. "Well, since it is necessary, I will speak to him. I shall not be long. Remain here to watch over our master, and whatever you hear, do not leave him for a moment. I shall soon return."

He departed on a run, and, to assure himself more positively of the execution of his wishes, he closed and locked the door of the chamber behind him.

CHAPTER VII.

THE WATCHERS AT THE SICK COUCH.

LAWYER BROWN, despite the remonstrances of the lady who accompanied him, continued to pull the bell at the gate with unabated vigor, when the intendant at length appeared on the steps of the chateau, and crossed the court in double-quick time. Victor, with his hands resting on his hips, assumed a calm and majestic air. As soon as the impatient notary perceived him, he cried, with all his might:

"Well! old knave! have you become deaf? What do you mean by making us wait so long at this gate?"

"I am sorry," replied the steward, with his imperturbable phlegm; "but at present no one can enter the chateau of Belle Isle."

The unknown lady and Brown seemed stupefied.

"One moment! one moment!" cried the notary, on perceiving Victor about to move away.

"Do you know it is I who established you as jailer and guardian of the chateau, when I legally acquired possession of the habitation and lands formerly belonging to Mr. Gerald Prevost, and which position you hold directly from me? Open, then; moreover, madame, who is with me, expects to pass a day or two at Belle Isle, and I intend you shall observe the most absolute respect for her. This is Madame Yelverton, who has been surnamed, at Baltimore, where she lives, the *Friend of the Poor*. I desire to do her special honor, and therefore command you to obedience to orders."

Victor threw himself back.

"That is all very well," said he, dryly; "but I shall not open."

The long and meager countenance of the notary became scarlet.

"Beware, my good man!" cried he, striking his foot. "Do you think you are still in the midst of and under the authority of the Prevosts, that you feel qualified to put my authority at defiance? If you refuse to open, we shall go and return with the officers of the law, with whom the strength reposes."

"There is something extraordinary in all this," said the veiled lady, who had been, therefore, a mute witness of the discussion. "I have heard of this old steward, as an honest and reasonable man; he must have grave motives, which I am unable to fathom, for refusing us admission to the house."

"Motives!" repeated he, with emotion, "I have, indeed, madame; yes, I will acknowledge it to you, whose heart appears kind, although your presence here might occasion gossip. I am not of those ungrateful servitors, who, after having enriched themselves from the patronage of their masters, would turn upon them their backs in adversity! Squire Brown knows well enough what I would say."

The person to whom had been given the name of Mrs. Yelverton, evinced a slight uneasiness;

but the lace veil that environed her concealed all her impressions. It was not the same with Brown. Victor's reproaches, so direct and so bitter, had disturbed him, and he lost countenance.

"Always the same story!" stammered he. "Always the same injustice—the same outrageous and stubborn dislike! You do not know whom you insult, master Victor," added he, with a tone of reproach; "but perhaps one day you will learn; one would judge that we—"

The veiled lady interrupted the man of the law, and made him a sign to withdraw to one side.

"Mr. Brown," said she, in a low and friendly tone, "there is a mystery in this affair which I wish to penetrate, at any price. But let me try if I cannot succeed better alone against the strange prejudices of Victor. Return to Bristol, where your business recalls you, while I remain here."

"As you command, madame; yet if that man, in his stupid waywardness, persists in refusing to open the gate, what shall we do? Would you not prefer to lodge at the inn, and wait until we can take severe measures?"

"No; in this event, I will remain, during the night, at Mr. Jackson's, where they are devoted to me. Thomas," she continued, addressing her servant, "carry my effects there, immediately."

The domestic moved away, with the packets, in the direction of the farm.

"Now, my good sir," continued the stranger to the attorney, "return tranquilly home, and do not be disturbed on my account. Above all, do not think of taking any notice of the injury that has been done us until we meet again. Tomorrow I shall again rejoin you at Bristol, and we will arrange this affair; meanwhile, be patient. Will you promise me?"

"Is it not for you to command?" asked the notary, bowing low to the lady, with an antiquated display of gallantry. "I do not know what your project is; but it can only be wise and honorable. I will abide by your wishes."

They again exchanged a few words; then the attorney bowed, threw a last look of rancor at the chateau, and moved rapidly away.

As soon as he had disappeared in the avenue, Mrs. Yelverton approached the grating and called, softly; the old steward advanced toward her with a crabbed look.

"My friend," said she, with ardor, "by all that is most sacred, do not conceal the truth from me. He has returned to the chateau; is it not so? Confess to me that he is here."

Victor let escape a movement of surprise; yet he demanded, with affected coolness:

"Of whom do you speak, madame? I do not understand you."

"Oh, you comprehend me," replied the unknown, impatiently. "I speak of him you love so much, Victor; I speak of your master, of your friend—of Gerald Prevost. Has he, at length, returned to his home, to the house of his fathers? Come! have pity, and do not worry me; he is here, I am sure; I know it!"

At the same time she raised her veil, and exposed to the old man features so angelic and so pure that he remained as if dazzled.

It was a woman, nearly twenty-five years of age, in all the brilliancy of her beauty. An indefinable expression of goodness was stamped on her features, while her dark eyes, with their long, silken lashes, revealed an ardent soul, most passionate in its attachments. Her mien and manner were characterized by a dignity that commanded respect. Victor believed that he had never seen the lady, for, having seen her once, it would be impossible to forget her. Involuntarily he felt intimidated.

"Madame," replied he, bowing, "since you are a person of consideration, a lady of quality, whom my master has undoubtedly known in happier days—"

She responded only by an equivocal gesture and a melancholy smile.

"Since," in short, continued the old man, "you are a friend of the family, I do not see why I should conceal the thing from you. Moreover, the news can not long be kept secret, and to-morrow will unquestionably spread over the whole country. Well, then, I acknowledge you have guessed rightly. Master Gerald has been here several hours. But, if it must be acknowledged, he is now suffering from a pernicious fever, and has almost lost his mind."

The young woman turned pale.

"He is ill—in danger, perhaps!" cried she. "My good man, lead me to him immediately; since he has lost intelligence, he can not— Victor, you are alone with Julia in this old house; you require an experienced person to aid you in

curing your master; take me. I am accustomed to sickness; for a long time, in Baltimore, where I live, I have performed the duties of a Sister of Charity; and since peace is re-established, I have purposed allying myself to that religious order. Conduct me to the sick man, I pray you; that will be a good action, and God will reward it."

The eyes of Mrs. Yelverton were filled with tears. She was, really, so beautiful and touching that it was impossible to resist her.

Victor drew a key from his pocket and unlocked the gate.

"Enter," continued he, throwing it open. "You shall see my master, and you are free to care for him as if you were his wife or his sister."

The lady glided rapidly between the two gilded iron posts, as if fearing that Victor might possibly change his mind.

Five minutes after, the old man introduced her into the chamber of the patient. Gerald, who was still sleeping, was not disturbed at her presence; but Julia could not subdue an exclamation of surprise. She would have questioned Victor, had not the latter carefully avoided her eye. Soon, both directed their attention to the unknown, whose acts and countenance were sufficiently striking to pique curiosity.

She had advanced with measured tread and precaution to the bed on which Gerald was reposing. She raised, with a trembling hand, the muslin curtain, and contemplated the patient for several minutes.

"How he has changed!" she sighed.

Then she knelt, and seizing a hand which reposed, moist and burning, on the satin coverlet, carried it to her lips. Stifled sobs followed in the shadow.

"Who is she?" whispered Julia, in the ear of Victor.

"I can not tell; she is certainly a lady. Probably some one whom he formerly loved, and who remembers him!"

Mrs. Yelverton at length arose. Without uttering a word, she removed her bonnet and veil, as well as a kind of scarf with which she was enveloped; then, dressed in a simple white robe, having for her head-dress only a gold comb fastening her beautiful dark locks at the top of her head, she installed herself as watcher at the pillow of Gerald Prevost.

"She must be of some importance, as you think, Mr. Victor," whispered Julia, regarding her with admiration. "As for me, I would sooner believe her one of the good fairies, who wander at night in the light of the moon on our heath. Such beauty is not of this world."

Part of the night rolled by without accident. The two old people, worn out with fatigue, were dozing in their arm-chairs near the fire. The unknown seemed to study with anxiety the uneasy symptoms of the patient; her finger on Gerald's pulse, she was counting minutely the pulsations. In order not to dazzle the delicate sight of the sick man, the lamp had been placed at the other end of the apartment, so that one might have said a light and vaporous shade was watching over the former master of the manor. From time to time she placed at Gerald's lips a glass which contained a salutary potion; she would raise his head cautiously, when the rattle escaped harshly his inflamed mouth.

As the night advanced, Gerald gave more frequent evidences of uneasiness. His chest was panting, his cheeks flushed. The lady approached the two old domestics.

"Hold yourselves ready," said she. "We are about witnessing an increase of the fever, which will undoubtedly be accompanied with delirium; your aid will then become necessary."

The foresight of Mrs. Yelverton was not slow to be realized. Gerald recovered, little by little, an artificial strength, and rose on his elbow. His eyes, wide open, were round and staring as those of a cataleptic. The delirium soon betrayed itself, and he commenced talking vehemently. His discourse still consisted of incoherent wailings over his destiny, having reference always to his adventures in a foreign land, to souvenirs of his youth, and narratives of his misery in Mexico, which subject recurred most frequently and with most detail to his memory.

"How deceitfully illness makes one talk!" remarked the old servitor, embarrassed; "one would really think master knew from experience all about the horrors of which he speaks! Oh! these crises in fevers are terrible!"

Mrs. Yelverton made no response to this observation, and did not even appear to have heard it. But the noise had attracted the attention of Gerald, who turned toward the strange woman and contemplated her in silence. Insensibly his countenance assumed an ex-

pression of pure joy, and he joined his hands, crying, at length, with an electrifying accent.

"Jeannette—*dear Jeannette!* Is this, indeed, you?"

The unknown lowered her head without responding, and recoiled a step.

"Oh! how beautiful you are!" continued he; "much more beautiful than formerly. But I understand: you are also dead, and we are in heaven; death enhances the beauty of virgins and saints. Well! You do not answer me? Jeannette, are you then only a phantom?"

And he turned convulsively on his couch; the sister stood bending over him.

"For pity's sake, madame," said Victor, in a low voice, "humor his whim—to contradict it would increase his illness."

"It will cost you so little," murmured Julia.

Gerald continued to toss on his bed, while he repeated with a sort of frenzy.

"Jeannette! Jeannette!"

"Here I am, my friend," at length observed the young woman, in a caressing voice, approaching him.

The patient became immediately calm, and resumed his contemplation.

"I see now," said he, sadly; "the angels still preserve some passion for earth. You have not forgotten my outrageous act below there at the Rocking Stone? Oh, I was cowardly, cruel, I know; but you, who from high heaven have seen me subjected to all the griefs and indignities of which humanity is capable, you know how I have atoned for that mistake. Such has been the effect of the curse your mother pronounced against me, and yet I have pardoned your mother. In your turn, beautiful and generous child, will you not forgive, as even I have forgiven? Jeannette, tell me, then, that you also pardon me."

He had imprisoned the hand of Mrs. Yelverton in his own, and he detained it firmly.

"I pardon you with all my heart, Gerald," said the lady in a penetrating tone, which struck with astonishment the two old servitors. "You have been full of indulgence for my mother—may God be merciful to you!"

The patient appeared to listen with a sort of ecstasy to these consoling words. The young woman wept and smiled by turns, and the smile, like the tears, gave her an indescribable charm.

"Well, Jeannette," responded Gerald, in an impassioned outbreak, "since we are here in a position where birth is effaced and inequalities disappear, where souls which have been long cherished without power to become joined are at length allied; tell me that you love me; I, who have loved you so truly, ask it. Say yes, Jeannette, and that in death, as in life, you have desired to be united to me!"

"You have spoken truly, Gerald; you have said truly," cried the young woman, passionately, "I have never loved another; I love thee still, I will love thee always!"

"Then, we are really in the abode of the blest," resumed the patient, whose features reflected a superhuman beatitude; "our misfortunes are ended, and we have reached, at length, the gates of Paradise, where there is no longer either terror or doubt. Jeannette, Jeannette!"

The last words were already indistinct; the paroxysm of the fever had passed, and Gerald fell slowly back on his pillow.

Mrs. Yelverton had been herself deeply moved at this scene; she trembled, and her breast heaved with sighs. When she saw Gerald was sleeping she would have withdrawn her hand, which he had detained; but he resisted, uttering a murmur of reproach; a moment after, the same attempt met with the same result; the young woman had not the courage to renew it, fearful of disturbing his sleep, so precious after so many attacks.

Nothing important transpired during the rest of the night. Toward morning, the two old people, overcome by fatigue, had in turn fallen asleep in their arm-chairs. When they awoke it was broad daylight; a ray from the sun was gliding through an opening in the window-curtains. Mrs. Yelverton was already standing in the middle of the chamber; she had resumed her scarf and veil, and was preparing to go out.

She approached Victor.

"The danger is over," said she, in a voice which had now recovered its tone and serenity; "when your master wakes, his reason will have returned; but he must not see me here. I am going."

Victor wished to show his gratitude for her generous devotion to his master.

"You owe me no thanks," replied the lady, with melancholy. "It is rather I who will be grateful to you all my life. But listen; Mr.

Prevost must always remain ignorant of a stranger's having watched at his pillow, and that he has received any other care than your own. Do not forget this, for an indiscretion might occasion grave embarrassment."

"Embarrassment!" repeated the old steward, surprised; "and for whom?"

"For him—for me—for all who love him."

"I do not understand you, madame; but enough. I promise you, in the name of Julia and for myself, your secret shall be guarded as that of the confessional."

Before going out, she again threw a look toward the alcove in which reposed the patient, and made a movement as if to approach it the last time; but she restrained herself, uttered a deep sigh and followed Victor, who led her to the exterior gate of the chateau.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE OVATION.

A FEW hours after, Gerald Prevost had recovered his intelligence, as his mysterious nurse had predicted. The sun, entering freely the chamber of honor, set in motion the million luminous atoms about the furniture. Although he at that moment enjoyed all his faculties, his physiognomy at times expressed something of that comic embarrassment of the *waking sleeper* of the "Thousand and one Nights," when, after falling asleep a poor serf in a closet, he awoke sultan of Bagdad in a palace. Gerald seemed unable to habituate himself to the luxury with which he was environed. It was not till he heard the title of *master*, with which Victor was gratified to dignify him, as in the days of his prosperity, that he was excited, astonished and made to doubt the evidence of his senses.

The old steward confessed how, on the evening before, he had refused admission to the attorney Brown, who had come to take possession of the chateau; but, faithful to his pledge, he did not say a word of Mrs. Yelverton, and he terminated his narrative by reproaching his master for having concealed from him his arrival at Belle Isle.

Gerald extended to him his hand.

"Pardon me, my good Victor," said he, affectionately. "But I would have spared my friends the spectacle of my ruin, and passed unperceived over my old possessions, without witnessing either regret or pity. God has not permitted it! Victor," continued he, after a moment's silence, "you have not told me all? Who watched over me, last night?"

"Julia and I, master," replied the old man, with embarrassment.

"And no one else?"

"We are the only inhabitants of the chateau."

"This is strange. It still seems to me that I beheld in that very place where you now stand a woman of ravishing beauty, whose presence filled me with joy and rapture. I thought I touched her hand and inhaled her pure breath. Once, while we were both in the obscurity, and I felt her to be near me without seeing her, it even seemed to me that her lips touched my forehead."

"How the fever turns our poor heads!" stammered Victor.

"Alas! alas! I would deceive myself," replied Gerald, sighing. He continued, after a pause, "I cannot remain longer here. Henceforth, a stranger to this house, I must yield the place to its real owners. You were wrong to deny their right, Victor, and must repair your fault immediately. In an hour I quit Belle Isle; I am resolved!"

At this moment, Julia entered and announced a doctor from Bristol.

"A doctor!" cried Gerald, reddening. "Who sent for him? They know, then, that I am here?"

"I do not understand," said Victor, "at least how— But, master Gerald, receive him, and we shall know from himself who sent him."

Gerald consented to this, and Julia soon introduced the doctor. But their curiosity was promptly baffled. The doctor was a taciturn young man, of chilling aspect, and recently established in the neighborhood, where he was acquainted with very few persons. "They had warned him," he said, "that his presence was needed at the chateau, and he had hurried there without further information." This explanation given, he felt the pulse of the sick man, addressed him the customary questions and wrote a prescription.

"This will amount to nothing," said he, with his imperturbable phlegm. "Repose, ease of

mind and the dose I prescribe will prevent a return of the fever. If he meets with new accidents, he must send for me."

Then he rose, bowed profoundly, and went out.

"He is not communicative," said Gerald, disappointed.

"Good! Good! He has, perhaps, his reasons for that," murmured Victor; "nevertheless that is his habit, and we must think of procuring the remedies he has ordered."

"Victor," asked Gerald, with an embarrassed look, "do you think that dose will cost much?"

The old steward looked at his master. The idea that a proprietor of Belle Isle could be so reduced by poverty as to refuse himself a medicine on which his health depended, if not his life, touched him to the bottom of his heart.

"Master," said he, with a reproachful accent, "if you will accept nothing from the depoulers of your property, you should remember, at all events, that all your old servant possesses is yours."

"And I would accept, my friend," responded Gerald, with warmth, "yes, I would accept it, if a real necessity— But you see, my dear Victor, I would have done well not to stop at Belle Isle; the comparison of the present with the past tortures us both."

He concealed his face in his hands and remained several instants absorbed in his thoughts.

Suddenly, a noise of voices resounded in the avenue; they were calling and conversing in tumult. Soon after the explosion of fire-arms awoke the echoes without.

"Good God! What is that?" cried Victor, frightened.

"It is unquestionably our friend, the man of the law, who is keeping his promise," said Gerald, with bitterness. "He has hunted together the people of Bristol, to assist him in recovering his chateau. He might have dispensed, however, with bringing the *posse*. Neither you, nor I, Victor, are disposed to make a valorous resistance!"

Victor ran to the window and observed, with a lively anxiety, the people who were approaching.

"What is that?" cried he. "They have guns, pistols! Do they dare— But no; there are women and children, and then Master Aleck, with his drum. But, remain here, master! I am going to receive them."

He descended the stairs on a run.

There ensued a parleying at the exterior gate of the chateau; then a loud hurrah made itself heard, followed by another discharge of fire-arms. At the same instant the outer iron gate rolled on its hinges, and the crowd precipitated into the court and invaded the stairs and corridors, uttering the wildest cries.

The tumult was rapidly approaching; but at the door of the chamber of honor a silence the most profound replaced those senseless demonstrations. Gerald, not knowing whether he was going to be attacked, remained motionless and ready for any thing. At length the door opened, and Victor first appeared, crying, in an animated voice:

"Here he is, my friends! This is our master—our beloved master. God has restored him to us! Enter, enter all; he will be glad to receive you."

"Hurrah for Master Gerald!" cried a hundred voices. "Hurrah for Master Gerald!"

And the crowd rushed into the chamber after the old attendant; it was the entire population of Belle Isle—sailors, fishermen and laborers, with their families. They were clad in their brightest habits, and bore in their hands enormous bouquets. In an instant Gerald was surrounded, pressed, overwhelmed with caresses; it was the frenzy of adoration that greeted him.

Gerald, amazed at this sudden ovation, at the very moment he was expecting all manner of outrages, knew hardly what to do. Yet, when he was able to understand what he was witnessing, when he recognized the friends of his youth among those who thronged the chamber, he awaited his turn. He welcomed, with especial cordiality, Aleck, Sailor Joe, John and above all old Peter, the patron of the *Ariel*, which had borne him from Belle Isle, seven years before. He asked after their families, and inquired, with touching kindness, what had happened during his long absence. The brave people, proud of his remembrance and these flattering distinctions, forced themselves forward to testify their gratitude.

"Hurrah for Master Prevost!" they thrice repeated, with enthusiasm.

Gerald raised his hand to denote that he

wished to speak, and their clamor immediately ceased.

"My friends," said the wanderer, in a moved tone, "I thank you for the proofs you have shown me of your attachment; but he is no longer the proprietor of Belle Isle, or your landlord, whom you now address. I am only a poor traveler, a modest citizen, like you, and such honors are not due to me."

There was a movement of surprise in the assembly. Most of the participants, seeing Gerald Prevost established in the home of his ancestors, surrounded by all the luxury and paraphernalia of his former condition, could not imagine, in their simplicity, that the consequences of long absence and an eventful revolution were not effaced from this moment, and that any one could contest his proprietorship.

"A fact," said old Peter; "the place was sold, and this was a great affliction for Belle Isle."

"What? Who had the right to sell it?" exclaimed Victor, with vehemence. "Who had this right, if not Master Gerald? The sale was an absurdity and an infamy. Let the robber call himself Brown, or the sheriff, or the country, he is no less a robber, nor is the act more just!"

The logic of Victor was a most brilliant success.

"That is true, at least!" said old Peter, the Nestor of the troupe.

"Ay, ay," repeated the others. "That sale was an injustice—a genuine robbery!"

"Well," resumed Victor, with undiminished zeal, "if you think so, shall we suffer the iniquity to be finished? Shall we suffer our dear master—"

"Silence! Victor," interrupted Gerald; "if you still have any respect for me, do not add another word. Resistance to the law would surely result in the sacrifice of those who might take part therein. My friends," continued he, turning toward his former vassals, "I did not come here with the purpose of creating disorder; I humbly submit to the changes that have been operated in my lot. The most precious portion of my heritage is that affection which, from generation to generation, the inhabitants of Belle Isle have displayed toward my family and myself; that portion has not been lost, and I thank you from the bottom of my heart. For the rest, I rely on Providence!"

No one responded; only a few sobs rose from the closed ranks of the auditors.

The good people were preparing to withdraw peaceably. Victor himself, his brow scowling and his fists clenched, no longer dared to speak of resistance, since Gerald had forbidden him so peremptorily. The occasion he had found to enlist in the interest of his master the population of the isle, was, therefore, about to escape him, when an unforeseen circumstance occurred to change the face of things and to awaken the slumbering passions of the throng.

The crowd was already about going out, when it suddenly stopped and appeared to fall back on itself. Then it opened, and a man of tall stature, dressed in black, with papers under his arm, entered the chamber. A murmur of rage arose on his passage, and menacing looks lighted on his form. It was the attorney Brown.

As he advanced toward the principal group, which surrounded Gerald, the assembly grew more irritated.

"He is bold, to show himself here!" said an old sailor, rolling his tobacco furiously between his jaws. "Ah! if master Gerald would permit it—if he would strike but one blow!"

"He comes to brave him," said a woman, shaking her fist at the man of the law.

Despite these disquieting remarks, Brown affected the greatest assurance. He bowed, in passing, to those whom he recognized; but every one turned his head.

Gerald, now standing, was awaiting his approach, with lowering brow. Brown bowed very low; Gerald saluted him slightly.

"Mr. Brown, I believe?" said the outcast, coldly. "Really, master, it is somewhat imprudent in you to show yourself here at such a moment."

"Imprudent!" replied the notary, smiling. "And why so? I come here, like all your old friends, to offer my respects and my felicitations."

"The hypocrite! he insults our master!" interrupted one of the auditors.

"Ay, ay; he insults him!" cried Victor, who saw in the exasperation of the assembly a means of resuming his favorite projects of violence.

"Boys of Belle Isle, shall we let him do it?"

"No, by all the devils!" cried Sailor Joe, "and if he does not instantly leave—"

"Come! let us end this," cried a voice. "And if he refuses to go out, we will throw him out by the window."

"Yes—by the window!"

A hundred arms rose, at the same time, to execute that sentence, when Gerald interposed.

"Peace! my friends," said he, authoritatively, "I alone am judge of the conduct of Mr. Brown under my eyes; and if I am willing to forget his wrongs, who, then, has the right to remember them?"

No one dared to speak. Brown, despite his assurance, had become pale.

"It is not right, perhaps, that I should thus have forced you to defend an old friend," said he, in an altered voice; "but, the fault is undoubtedly with me, who should sooner have explained my purpose. Mr. Prevost, it is necessary for you to accord me, for an instant, the favor of a special interview."

The outcast cared for no explanation, and he had anxiously wished to avoid it. Yet he pleasantly motioned out his visitors.

"Hold! hold! He has some snare, the old fox!" murmured a coarse fisherman.

"He is adroit," thought Victor. "The notary knows their weakness, and undoubtedly has some secret design. Well!" he continued, aloud, "master can not remain alone in intercourse with that man!"

The offensive suspicion contained in that observation again called a light pallor to the cheeks of the attorney.

"Mr. Victor will hear our conversation, if it seems good to him," said he, coldly.

"With the permission of Master Gerald, then, I will remain," replied the attendant; "but that does not suffice."

He approached a group in which were old Peter, Sailor Joe, and a few other of the most devoted inhabitants. He spoke low to them. Their fists were energetically clenched; then the men followed the crowd, whose retreat the announcement of a barrel of cider had rendered singularly active. There soon remained in the chamber only Gerald Prevost, the attorney and Victor.

CHAPTER IX.

THE ATTORNEY.

GERALD had thrown himself on a seat and pointed the notary to another with a fatigued and depressed air.

"For Heaven's sake, sir, be as brief as possible," said he. "You understand that these reviews of the past are grievous to me; I am anxious to end them, so as to be able to depart without delay."

"Depart," repeated Brown, in a friendly tone; "what are you thinking of, Mr. Prevost? Does the chateau of Belle Isle displease you to that extent? Are not the changes worked during your absence to your taste? Have you not remarked the rich meadows and the fertile fields which have replaced the arid heathers and the infected swamps of former days? These innovations have, indeed, irritated very much our friend Victor; but no one can reasonably complain of ameliorations that have augmented, in a considerable degree, the revenues of the property. And the repairs which have been made to the chateau; I hope they also have left nothing to be desired. The greatest regard has been observed to preserve the souvenirs and traditions of your family. I must also be permitted to inquire whence can arise this horror for the house of your father?"

"You forget, sir, that the more improved and worthy of regret I have found it, the more sad I must feel to leave it."

"And wherefore, I pray you?"

"Because it no longer belongs to me."

"It no longer belongs to you!—and who has told you that? What notification have you received from me, your legal and official representative? How can you know whether or not I have wisely observed the directions you confided to me?"

Gerald made a gesture of astonishment; Victor was listening with open mouth.

"But, sir," replied the wanderer, "in case of compulsion, such as confiscation of my effects, the effect of these directions would be annulled."

"How? Have you never heard of what use the letter is under such circumstances?" replied Brown. "The document which was handed me by Victor, after your departure, constituted me defender of your interests; what matters it what means I have employed if I have only succeeded in my purpose? In fact, Mr. Prevost, I could not prevent your property's being seized and regularly sold by the old government. I strove with all my power to avoid that

confiscation; but I was overcome. Nevertheless, sir," continued he, opening the papers which he had placed on a table, "if you will throw your eyes over these instruments, you can convince yourself that you are still proprietor of the chateau of Belle Isle, and that you are qualified to reclaim the revenues, arrearages and other items, of which I am ready, for my part, to render an account, be it to yourself or to such other person as you may be pleased to designate."

In measure as he advanced in his remarks, a profound stupefaction spread over the features of Gerald and Victor; but while those of the old domestic were radiant with joy, those of the master became clouded with defiance and reserve.

"What! Mr. Brown," cried the old man, "you are, then, decidedly a brave man! By St. Peter! who would have thought? But, pshaw! this is impossible!"

The notary smiled shrewdly, while Gerald besought Victor to calm himself.

"Mr. Brown," replied he, "I did not understand what you came to tell me; I do not yet know—"

"How you are still proprietor of the chateau and its dependencies? I am going to explain that."

At the same time, he took the different papers lying on the table, and entered into the most circumstantial details of this affair at first so incredible.

Being unable, despite all his professional ruses, to prevent Belle Isle being sold, Brown had arranged to bid it in. The price of redemption was paid in installments, of which the amount was simply nominal. Having thus become the possessor of the property of the Prevosts, the attorney had to advance the funds to cultivate, and, according to the expression so odious to Victor, to "put in refunding condition" the lands theretofore so little improved. In return, the speculation had been excellent: despite the misfortunes of the times, the revenue of the property had quintupled in a few years, so that at this epoch the considerable debt with which the property had been burdened by the expenses of its redemption, repairs and improvement, was entirely paid, capital and interest. It was even returning to its old proprietorship, after auditing accounts, a considerable sum, which the notary drew from his pocket, in the shape of a little bag of gold, and deposited on the table.

Brown explained at length, as the reader may conceive, every thing. He affirmed nothing without corroborating his speech by authentic documents. The accounts seemed perfect; the obscurities were cleared up, and Gerald was five times richer than when he left home.

He listened with religious attention, to the man of the law, who concluded thus:

"It only remains for you, Mr. Prevost, to receive that sum, and to give me an acquittal; at the same time you will discharge me from the administration of the property which I have restored to your possession. To that end I pray you to sign a paper which I have drawn up in advance, and which is this. You will remark that I have profited only by inserting in that document certain conditions to my own advantage; that is to say, that I, Joseph Peter Brown, attorney, etc., am privileged to visit as often and at such times as I may be pleased until my death, the mounds, stones, and other Indian monuments and relics of Belle Isle; that I may measure them, draw plans and make signs of them, without any person's opposing me, and that I may be allowed to publish in them dissertations, articles, memoirs, and such other writings as I may choose. Let us see, Mr. Prevost, is that clause too long, and must it be modified?"

The notary really seemed to think that these miserable favors were sufficient recompense for seven years of fatigue and care.

We no longer find attorneys and counselors of this description!

Gerald arose; his eyes were moist with tears.

"Mr. Brown," said he, with an accent profoundly altered, "at the outset I must ask your pardon for the suspicions I have conceived against you. Appearances have deceived me: you are my friend; you are an honest man!"

And he folded him to his breast.

"Alas! Master Gerald," stammered the attorney, returning the affectionate embrace, "that I, the ancient servitor of your family— I, honored with the confidence of your worthy uncle, the chevalier, could ever have wronged you! God is my witness, I would, at the price of my blood, have diverted the misfortunes which have befallen you!"

While the attorney and his client were thus delivering themselves, Victor approached and seized the hand of Brown, which he embraced with a sort of frenzy.

"And I, Mr. Brown," said he; "and I—I am a blockhead, a wretch, a knave; can you forgive me? Will you ask God to pardon me? As for me, I shall reproach myself for my wickedness all my life. To think that I should have been the first to throw the stone at you, to incite the tenants against you, and that if they had chosen to believe me—"

The notary wiped his eyes and turned abruptly.

"Ah! This is you, old barker?" replied he, gayly. "Well, I am no longer, then, a man deserving to be stoned to death, a rascal of a scribbler, who intrigues to despoil his benefactors? You have enjoyed your spleen at my expense; but I told you I should have my turn. Yet, let Mr. Prevost sign for me that explicit receipt, and I promise you we will never more speak of the past."

At the same time, he dipped a pen in the ink, and presented it to Gerald. The latter was attentively turning the leaves of the papers.

"One moment, Mr. Brown," said he, motioning back the pen which was offered him. "Before accepting that brilliant fortune you would return me, I have still a few explanations to ask of you. I am quite inexperienced in business matters, yet I have remarked in these documents some strange irregularities. Among other points obscure to me," he continued with calm dignity, "I do not see any sum accounted as paid for repairs to the chateau; now, the expense, if one may judge from the rich furnishing of this chamber, must have been considerable."

"Ah! You have remarked that omission?" replied the attorney, who strove to conceal his anguish. "That fact arises from particular circumstances, of which it is time to instruct you. One of those who formerly contributed most to the devastation of the chateau of Belle Isle was seized with remorse a moment before death, and wished to efface, as far as she might be able, the circumstance of her wrongs toward you. She therefore charged me, as her testamentary executor, to refurnish the mansion, in anticipation—"

"And who was this person?" interrupted Gerald, impressively.

"Well, it was Mrs. L'Estrange, who died at Baltimore in 177—"

"Mrs. L'Estrange!" cried Gerald, excitedly, "the mother of poor Jeannette! Then she pardoned the mad jest practiced at her expense?"

"See there!" grumbled Victor; "the widow was afraid of the devil!"

Gerald was plunged into grievous reflections, which this name had awakened in him. He at length replied:

"I do not know whether the scruples with which this secret has been guarded will permit me to accept the legacy. But, this is not all; when I consider the amount necessary to raise for the preservation of my patrimony, either I am deceived, or Mr. Brown was not sufficiently rich to make alone such advances—"

"And what do you know of my affairs? We men of business have some resources! Again, another party, one of those rich clients who intrust their interests with me, wished to join me in accomplishing an act of justice—at the same time running the risk of thus advantageously investing the funds in my keeping. These advances have been repaid, principal and interest; in short, the receipts are at my office; is there any thing in this to wound the delicacy of Mr. Prevost?"

Brown had spoken with much vehemence.

"My old friend," said Gerald, "be indulgent. Do not be offended at these objections, which my self-respect has obliged me to address you. I am filled with gratitude for your devotion to me; but I must not conceal from you my impression. It appears evident to me that you wish to make an alms-deed of the domain of my fathers, instead of rendering that which legitimately belongs to me."

"Alms-deed! Master Gerald!" replied the attorney, moving on his seat; "how could you employ that expression? Alms! well! suppose an unknown person, imagining great injustice should be repaired either to your family or to yourself, has desired to privately contribute to the redemption of your patrimonial effects; where would be the evil, again?"

"In that case, Mr. Brown, I would ask of you the name of that person, and I would inquire under what circumstances that person had vouchsafed me such favors."

"Never!" cried the attorney, rising with a

bound, "never will that name escape my lips! I have promised it; I have sworn it. Master Gerald, do not expect that from me; it is impossible."

"Well, then," said Gerald, with firmness, rising, in his turn. "I will not sacrifice, on my side, my self-respect and my honor, in receiving favors which I can not repay. Mr. Brown, take away that gold and these papers," continued he to the astonished attorney. "I will consent to pass here three days more in order to recover my strength. This term expired, I shall leave the country forever; at least—"

"A condition? Speak."

"At least, until I shall have seen the real owner of Belle Isle, and learned from himself the motives of his disinterestedness."

"Do not hope for that; I have told you, it is impossible. If you know—but, during these seven years, you have undoubtedly found other means—"

"No other, Mr. Brown, rest assured."

"We shall see; but, at least, Master Gerald," said the attorney, lowering his voice, "condescend to accept, in the form of a loan, this little sack of gold, of which you have need; you can return it later to me. Do not refuse an old man who implores you—"

"Thanks, Brown; I will borrow nothing which I am certain of being unable to return; no more of this; it would offend me."

The lawyer resumed the sack, sighing.

"This is a point, however," said he, with insistence, "on which your rigor must necessarily yield. I allude to the matter of the legacy of Mrs. L'Estrange. You have no valid objection to raise against that restitution, of which you know the legitimacy."

"You deceive yourself, my dear Brown," replied Gerald, with melancholy. "Having deliberated well, I will no sooner accept this gift than the others. I cruelly offended that unhappy mother; her vengeance was just. The more horrible that vengeance was in its consequences to me, the more I bless it. You do not know, Brown," continued he, with an eager air, "how wrong I acted!"

The old notary bowed sadly, and would have gone out.

"One moment!" cried Victor, running after him. "You cannot pass until I have given instructions."

"What instructions?"

The door opened, and Brown perceived in the corridor two men, with guns over their shoulders, who were acting as sentinels; two more were watching under the windows of the chamber of honor.

"Ah! They would challenge me!" said the lawyer.

"They will not challenge you," replied Victor. "Pardon us, Mr. Brown."

At the same time he approached the two functionaries.

"My friends," said he, "these arms are unnecessary. We have been deceived; Mr. Brown is the most devoted and faithful friend of Mr. Prevost!"

The two fishermen, without further demonstration, bowed with respect, and surrendered the passage.

"The most devoted and faithful friend!" repeated the attorney. "Oh! no, Victor; there is one who loves him still more than you or I!"

CHAPTER X.

THE MYSTERIOUS BENEFactor.

THE time fixed, by Gerald Prevost himself, as the term of his sojourn at Belle Isle, slipped tranquilly away. Thanks to the prescriptions of the taciturn doctor of Bristol, the fever had not reappeared, and with the exception of considerable weakness, the patient seemed entirely cured.

Brown had returned several times to the charge since the interview which had previously taken place at the chateau, and had renewed his instances; but he had been unable to obtain any encouragement from Gerald, whose upright heart disdained subterfuges and mental reservations. But the calmness and serenity of Gerald, who had never spoken of his departure, had given Victor a feeling of security; moreover, he was expecting nothing, when, toward the end of the third day, at the moment of sunset, the bell of his master summoned him to the chamber of honor.

He found Gerald standing and dressed. He held in one hand the little package, wrapped in a handkerchief, of which we have before spoken, and in the other a hazel-wood staff, which he had cut during the day from a neighboring grove.

At the sight of these preparations, the motive of which was so evident, Victor turned pale.

"Master Gerald," stammered he, "is it possible that you think of—"

"I am determined."

"Then," replied the old man, eagerly, "I shall do what has been expressly recommended to me. Master Gerald, I implore you to have patience for a single hour; by that time, I may, possibly, bring you some tidings that may change your determination."

"Where are you going, Victor?"

"To Bristol. Give me your word that you will not leave the chateau until you shall have seen me again."

"Well, I consent; but tell me, at least—"

"Nothing, I can tell nothing. Adieu! Master Gerald; you have promised!"

He went out, and a moment after the gate of the court swung closed.

The hour had not elapsed when the noise of precipitate footsteps resounded in the corridor, and Victor opened the door. The obscurity at first led him to believe that the chamber was vacant.

"Master Gerald, are you there?" he asked, with uneasiness.

"What is the matter? who wants me?" said Gerald, trembling.

He had risen, and his dark shadow was defined in the light rays which the moon projected.

"Is it you, Victor?" he continued. "How quickly the hour has flown. But, pray now, let me depart in peace. Where is Julia that I may say adieu? Come, now, do not detain me longer, for I must go forth again."

"No; you have even promised Mr. Brown you would remain at Belle Isle, if the person who secretly purchased your property could be shown you, and justify the intercession in your affairs. Your conditions are accepted; it is finally consented you shall have an interview."

"When?"

"This very instant, if you will follow me."

"Where will you conduct me?"

"To the farm, where Mr. Brown is going to repair with the unknown."

Gerald hesitated.

"Of what use?" said he, slowly. "I have accepted my lot; I would preserve my misery. Let us see this modest benefactor, however, who has undertaken to relieve our house from its ruins; I owe him my acknowledgments and thanks."

He took the arm of Victor, and they went forth together from the chateau, taking the path overhanging the beach.

The hour was magnificent. The evening breeze was tempered to a warm and perfumed wind. The sluggish waves beat loudly against the shore, and the sea displayed that singular phosphorescence, which it acquires at times during the mild evenings of summer, and which some attribute to electricity, and others to innumerable luminous animalcules; then it is that the strait resembles a stream of fire. The rocks with which the channel was incumbered rose like somber points in the center of circles of scum that clustered round them. Sluggish masses occasionally appeared, gliding at a distance over the waters, while a tremulous voice was chanting some popular old ballad; these were fishermen returning from their excursions, and regaining port after a day of fatigues.

Gerald, looking out over the silver surface of the waves, saw appearing afar a skiff in rapid motion, which seemed to be directing its course toward the terrace. It was soon easy to distinguish the little craft, which contained three persons; a boatman was actively rowing, while behind were two voyagers seated and motionless. Before they had even reached the beach, Gerald recognized the attorney Brown as one of the parties seated in the stern; the other was a woman enveloped in a long white veil.

Gerald passed his hand over his forehead.

"A woman," murmured he, pensively. "Is it a woman who has secretly ministered to my prosperity? Who can she be? Probably some amiable lady of the neighborhood, whom I formerly knew."

And a light smile played on his lips at this souvenir of his youth.

The skiff touched the shore along which ran the farm. The old attorney first stepped to the land, and turned to offer his hand to the lady whom he accompanied; but the latter, without awaiting his aid or that of the oarsman, rose with an air of feverish impatience, and leaped lightly to the beach. On perceiving Gerald, who was watching with curiosity from the parapet above, she wrapped herself closely in her veil.

"I do not know her," murmured Gerald. "Queer!"

Victor pressed forward to open the gate under a little archway that faced the sea. After having exchanged a few words with the new-comers, they remained behind, while Brown and his companion advanced alone toward Gerald.

The lady in the white veil appeared deeply moved; her step was uncertain. She, so supple and so light a moment since, was now leaning on the nervous arm of the attorney. As to the rest, it was impossible to judge her stature or features under the embroidered veil that concealed them.

Gerald bowed politely.

"A beautiful night, Mr. Prevost!" said the attorney, with a mixture of humor and of deference. "A beautiful evening! But it is better appreciated by persons of your age than mine. This white fog is splendid for catarrhs, and salt water sprinkled over one is a capital antidote for rheumatism!"

"It is not I, my dear Brown, who chose the place and the hour," replied Gerald, distractedly.

"That is true; that is true. But you have such an obstinate head. Faith! I do not know what might have happened, if a will as firm as yours had not yielded to the necessity. At all events, you will no longer have motives for departing; you wished to see the person who was leagued with me, in order to preserve intact your heritage, and, despite her repugnance, she has responded to your wish; she is before you."

Gerald bowed again.

"Indeed, I would have been very ungrateful to her," said he, "if, whatever may be the determination which inspires my conscience, I had not sought this occasion to express my gratitude. It would have been cruel to refuse me that satisfaction, and now that it is accorded me, I find myself under the necessity of being still more exacting."

He interrupted himself, hoping that the lady would anticipate his wish. She did not budge.

"I do not know," continued Gerald, examining her with his penetrating eye, "the name of my benefactress. Above all, I am ignorant under what circumstances she has believed she should offer me her devotion and her services."

The unknown made a movement, as if she was going to speak; but it was only after a considerable interval that a feeble and choked voice could be distinguished behind the worked veil.

"Mr. Prevost," she said, "how will it serve you to know my name and my person? Know, simply, that in co-operating with Mr. Brown for the preservation of your effects, I thought I was acquitting a sacred debt; it is I who owe you thanks, if—"

"Good God! that voice!" cried Gerald. "Madame, for pity do not sport with me longer. Who are you? In heaven's name, let me see your face!"

She hesitated, but finally lifted her veil with a trembling hand. It was Mrs. Yelverton, the beautiful creature who had watched with Gerald during the night of his fever; it was also Jeannette L'Estrange!

The young man uttered a cry.

"She! Jeannette!" stammered he. "The dead, then, can walk out of their tombs?"

The lady smiled.

"I am not a phantom, Mr. Prevost," said she. "The tomb has not yet closed over me, although I am dead for the world, for my friends as well as for my enemies."

"Dead?" repeated Gerald, mechanically.

"Listen to the secret we have concealed from you," interrupted the attorney, advancing in his turn. "The report of the death of Miss L'Estrange spread the same night that you left Belle Isle, but it was a fabrication. She was unable to leave the country for some days, and then her health was completely restored. Yet she desired to leave the impression at Bristol that she really was dead; and you will understand that resolution which was taken in concert with her mother, if you will recall the event that drew upon her the ridicule of the neighborhood. Since that time Miss L'Estrange has dwelt at Baltimore, where she remained very retired, and occupied in works of charity. When she has chanced to be here, she has always been covered by a worked veil, as you now perceive."

At first, Gerald was incapable of comprehending these explanations. A single thing seemed to him assured and distinct; Jeannette was living.

"But then," replied he, with warmth, "it was you I saw at my pillow during the crisis of my fever. Oh, I recognize you! I recognize you!"

"It was I."

"I well know," cried Gerald, "that divine woman, those impressive cares, those consoling words, all were not a dream. Jeannette, do you remember, then, that in that delightful hour, when I already thought you and I no longer belonged to this world, you accorded me a generous and complete pardon?"

"My pardon, Mr. Prevost!" said the young woman, with a quivering voice. "Should I not rather have implored yours? Do I not know what misfortunes have visited you during the past few years by the act of a person whom I must love and respect despite her errors? Did our injury, fatal in its consequences, but frivolous in its conception, merit so long and severe a punishment? Nay, it is for me to humiliate myself before you, Mr. Prevost; it is for me to supplicate you."

"This is not all," cried Gerald, carried away by his emotions. "In that delicious night, of which every circumstance is graven on my heart, Jeannette, you pronounced a few words more dear than all to my soul! You said—oh! that acknowledgment so full of hope for me!—was it also a reality?"

Miss L'Estrange lowered her eyes.

"It would have been inhuman," returned she, "to wound the fantasies and whims of a poor invalid whom a fever was transporting."

"Is it there, then, that the dream commences?" replied Prevost, with an accent of profound sadness. "Ah! why have you disabused me?"

They were both silent. The attorney, who had not lost a word of that conversation, thought he must intervene.

"You now understand, my dear Gerald," said he, in an affectionate tone, "how ill-grounded are your scruples when you refuse to accept the restitution of your patrimony; this is simple and rigorous justice. Mrs. L'Estrange, who excited the population against you, repented of her violence, when she had coolly viewed the terrible result; I was a witness of her remorse, and encouraged with all my power her resolution to compensate in her will for the damage she had caused you. After her death, her noble daughter wished to make the change, the reparation still more complete. Your property was then for sale; she conceived the idea of ransoming it, in order to restore it to you whenever you might return to the home of your youth. But it was feared that your cultivated sensibility of 'birth' and 'family,' would induce you to repel the intervention of a stranger in your interests. In order to reassure an excessive delicacy, I prepared the account of which you detected the irregularities. I have since prepared another, a masterpiece, in which every item is set forth, and in accepting which you can never experience the least scruple. Your reason has matured in adversity; a simple glance of the eye enabled you to discover in the first accounting what I had believed impenetrable. At all events, this frank and loyal explanation should satisfy your scruples, and I trust you will no longer afflict us by refusing what would henceforth be caused only by an unreasonable pride."

Gerald listened in silence, with his eyes fixed on Jeannette.

"Believe what our friend, Mr. Brown, has told you," resumed she, in her turn, joining her hands. "Mr. Prevost, do not be relentless toward me and toward the memory of my poor mother. All the evils which have overwhelmed you during seven years, and of which you betrayed the fact, during the night which you now recall, are our work. Let me have some repose; appease the shade of my mother, that cries from its tomb! To present you humbly my demand, I have returned to this place, where my name is ridiculed; I have renounced the solemn vow I had mentally undertaken, never to return to this place, where I have been the sport of the people. At the moment I am about returning, and this time forever, to the peaceful retreat I found remote from here, after my misfortune, let me carry the consoling reflection that ancient wrongs are at length wiped out. Mr. Prevost, good and generous Gerald, do not resist my appeal, and I will bless you the rest of my life, and call incessantly on you, in my prayers, the mercies of heaven."

The plaintive voice of Jeannette, her supplicating attitude, her tears, seemed to render her irresistible. While she was speaking, Brown had occasion to use, more than once, his handkerchief and his snuff-box. Still, Gerald remained somber, as if these ardent prayers had made little impression on his heart.

"No," said he, at length, with a dry tone, "the dignity of my name prevents my accept-

ing these benefits. Miss Jeannette L'Estrange exaggerates her obligations to me. Let her retain what belongs to her, according to law; I have nothing to lay claim to here."

These words were pronounced with deliberation. Jeannette threw at him a look full of grief and reproach.

"Alas!" murmured she. "You have never been unjust and cruel, except toward me!"

And the tears rolled down her cheeks. The features of Gerald lost their severe expression.

"Pardon me! pardon me!" said he with ardor, taking her hand; "I cannot show myself sufficiently grateful for so much self-denial. Jeannette, if, as I believed for a moment, only a moment, you had loved me as I love you, all might have been repaired, perhaps."

Jeannette withdrew her hand, without responding.

"Faugh!" cried the attorney, with a burst of impatience; "he must be blind not to see—"

A rapid gesture from Jeannette cut short the word. Gerald detected the movement.

"What is it, Mr. Brown?" exclaimed he.

"Speak, I pray you! Can it be possible? Alas! I must end this horrible anxiety! Jeannette, by all that is most sacred, I adjure you to answer me! Do you love me enough to consent to become my wife?"

"His wife!" repeated Brown, with feigned astonishment, as if the idea had not yet occurred to him. "Well! By all the stars! why not? The last vestige of family distinctions has been wiped out by the late war and our confederation of States. What barrier should interpose?"

Jeannette was deeply agitated; she had drawn her veil over her face, and, choked with sobs, she appeared incapable of speaking.

"A word! in heaven's name, a single word!" murmured Gerald, with increasing violence. "Jeannette, my life is going to depend on a single word from your mouth!"

"Alas, Gerald," replied she, with a sigh. "The reprobation that weighs on me is more formidable than you imagine. I had wished to conceal that truth in the fear of aggravating your regrets; but the scandal-mongers, who prejudice, are blind and do not pardon. Cease, then, wishing to associate your honored name with the shame that weighs on mine; courageous and daring as you may be, this burden would be too heavy, and you would, perhaps, be—"

"Well! if the burden is heavy, it is all the more reason for my insisting!" interrupted Prevost, impetuously. "I tell you it is my duty to struggle with you against the malice of men. Moreover, Jeannette, your exquisite delicacy would exaggerate the evil. It is impossible that the remembrance of that foolish jest, after so many years—"

"Listen," interrupted Miss L'Estrange, extending her hand toward the channel.

A skiff was passing before the terrace, and the young oarsman who rowed it was chanting, in a clear voice, the song of the "Rocking Stone," composed by the vicious Anderton.

The bark moved on until the words became lost in the rolling of the waves. Jeannette smiled with bitterness.

"You see, Mr. Prevost," said she, "that time has not effaced the ridicule of that incident. The miserable verses you just heard have become as popular at Belle Isle as at Bristol; in the taverns and dram-shops, in the kitchens of the cottages, everywhere, even in your house, they are constantly striking the ear. How would Mr. Prevost, the idol of this place, dare to attack this old legend? for such it has now become. How would he dare say: 'That woman, whom you pursue with your ridicule, that woman is my wife!'"

Prevost hesitated, but only a few seconds.

"Well, Jeannette," cried he, with energy, "I will have the courage, and success shall crown my efforts. I have conceived a project. That which has been the instrument of your ridicule will serve for a reversal. Have confidence in me; have confidence in yourself and in God. Jeannette, despite your fears, my determination is not changed; it is with perfect intelligence and after deliberation that I again adjure you to answer that question; 'Will you be my wife?'"

The young woman became unsteady, as if she was going to fall from weakness.

"Mercy!" said he. "The struggle has overcome me; I have exhausted courage and effort. Spare me! out of pity, spare me!"

Gerald glided forward to sustain her.

"Jeannette," murmured he, passionately, "how must I interpret—"

"Alas! what acknowledgment is required, my Gerald?" replied she, in a low voice. "Have

I not already told my secret? I love you more than my life. I would have struggled; but I am vanquished. Well, then, let my lot be accomplished?"

And in the pale light of the moon, the two lovers joined in a chaste embrace.

CHAPTER XI.

A FESTAL DAY.

ONE beautiful autumn day, Belle Isle presented the appearance of a holiday. Since morning the silvery village bell had been chanting a lively tune, in its clock-tower, environed by stone lace-work. The population for ten leagues around seemed to have made a rendezvous of the island for a great solemnity. A flotilla of barks, canoes, skiffs and small boats of every shape and description were incessantly crossing the channel and depositing on the beach handsome men and beautiful women in full dress, and sailors, fishermen and farmers, with their wives and daughters, in holiday attire.

The joyous cries, the loud hurrah, the sounds of instruments, with which were mingled at intervals the discharges of firearms, in token of rejoicing, made a deafening noise, which would have covered that of the sea and winds during an equinoctial tempest.

While the mass of people were delivering themselves to the allurements of the festival, several grave personages, notable inhabitants of Belle Isle, whom we have before met, were chatting to one side under a thrice centenarian oak, in the avenue leading from the chateau to the village. A cask of wine was tapped at their side, and they did not scruple to watch and fill their glasses when they felt disposed. The conversation was very animated in that reunion of privileged characters, and was turning on the event which served as an excuse for these rejoicings.

"I assure you, master Peter," said Sailor Joe, with a positive air, "that all this is enough to turn the heads of the parish, and certainly he has done many good actions. How! Here we are, a dozen faithful servitors of the old family, and late as it is, as yet we know neither the name nor the quality, nor any thing concerning the new lady of the house."

"That is very true; we have not even seen her figure, and do not even know whether she is young or old."

"You are right, Sailor Joe," responded Peter, the fisherman, who had now grown quite old and infirm; "you and I, however, have perhaps some title to the confidence of Master Gerald. You remember our journey with him in 17—. Holy mother! what a time! The poor *Ariel*, you recollect, was constantly under water, and we were forced to a thousand maneuvers to prevent its being overwhelmed by the waves. Yes, yes; during the thirty-six hours that the squall lasted, there was not a minute when we were not threatened with death! But we were bent on saving our young master, and we never minded the danger."

"Hush!" interrupted John; "here is Mr. Victor, with the sexton, who is undoubtedly going to announce something."

In short, Victor appeared to be giving instructions to that functionary, who stopped at a short distance from the principal crowd, and mounting on a stool, announced to his auditors:

"Mr. Prevost is about to repair to the Rocking Stone with the good lady, his newly wedded wife; then the sports will commence. All the runners, wrestlers and dancers are summoned first to repair thither."

After that brief proclamation, its promulgator dismounted, and subsequently repeated it further on, until the fact became generally known.

The notable characters of the isle, whose presence we have just briefly noticed, hastened toward the cliff, while a great fermentation betrayed itself around them; the news that the new bride was going to submit to the formidable test of the Rocking Stone, had set the crowd in motion, and a goodly number of the curious had already repaired to the scene of action, to assist at that interesting ceremony.

When old Peter, Sailor Joe and their companions reached the cliff, they found that the crowd had completely invaded the sort of inclosure where the stone was situated. The ranks of the curious extended back to the shore of the neighboring creek, and yet on all sides might be seen arriving new-comers, no less impatient and im-

pressed. There was not a ridge of earth or rock that was not charged with spectators; one might have said a human wall surrounded the talisman. An old hazel-nut tree, situated at the crest of the cliff, was supporting unaided a group of audacious children, whom the least accident might have precipitated onto the heads of their parents, who little enough anticipated such a catastrophe.

Nevertheless, that crowd so compact opened with an effort to give passage to the important wights of Belle Isle. While his companions were finding the best stands they could, Sailor Joe, preoccupied with a secret idea, was striving vigorously with his elbows and shoulders to reach the Rocking Stone. Without paying the least attention to the exclamations of those whom he pushed to the right and left, he arrived before the rock, and, putting all his weight against it sought by a sudden effort to move it.

It would not stir; peals of laughter and sharp jests greeted the useless attempt of the robust fisherman.

"We must see; we must see!" replied Joe, shaking his head. "Now there, boys, who is going to lend a hand here?"

More than thirty vigorous arms were immediately raised toward the stone.

"Aha-a-a, heave!" cried Joe, as if he were leading his comrades in drawing a cable.

All hands were raised at the same time, and every effort was merged into one powerful, energetic, irresistible force yet the stone remained as firm as if its base had been buried twenty feet under ground.

"Aha-a-a, heave!" again cried Joe.

The same result.

After the third attempt, the discouraged laborers straightened themselves, and wiped away the perspiration that covered their foreheads.

"That is good," replied Sailor Joe, tranquilly. "Thanks, friends. Now I know what I wished to know."

He espied on the escarpment of the cliff a pointed rock, in the form of a keel, whence the whole scene might be surveyed. The hardest gymnast would hardly have dared stride that perilous point, in the fear of breaking it off and precipitating it into the valley. Yet the fisherman unhesitatingly embraced the opportunity it afforded him to survey the scene; mounting, therefore, with the agility of a cat, he attained the extremity and seated himself there with perfect ease. There, setting at defiance the observations and jokes of the throng, he patiently awaited the developments of the occasion.

He did not have long to wait; soon a distant noise of violins, fifes, drums and other musical instruments announced the arrival of the wedding cortege. Sailor Joe, from his elevated position, saw it clear the plantations that covered the center of the isle, and advance, in long file, toward the cliff. At its head was marching the old attorney, Brown, giving his arm to the newly-married, of whom he represented the father. He was in ceremonial costume, hat in hand, and was acquitting himself of his duties with a pompous gallantry that testified how proud he was of such an honor. The bride wore a dress of white satin; a virginal veil escaped from the crown of white roses which formed her head-dress; only this veil no longer concealed her countenance, but floated in undulating folds over her shoulders. Her countenance was calm and modest, although not devoid of assurance. Then came Gerald, clad with a noble and elegant simplicity, walking with serene air and a confident step. He had given his arm to Miss Brown, who, charged with all the feathers, flowers and trinkets that one woman could wear, was vouchsafing him her most gracious smiles. The ladies and gentlemen of the vicinity, with some of whom the reader has already been made acquainted, followed next in couples. One was quite prominent from his tall stature and his badge of collector of customs—an office he now held from the new republic; his political opinions, as the reader may have conjectured, had undergone considerable modification since we first met with him. There were several others present, who had figured in the first visit to the Rocking Stone, before the departure of Gerald from Belle Isle. It would seem as if it had been preconcerted to bring together all those who had previously visited the place, who still existed or inhabited the country.

A personage of considerable importance had preceded the procession, and entered the inclosure of the Rocking Stone; this was Victor, who appeared to act as chief of police at the festival. He was dressed in completely new

attire, but, as usual, entirely in black; his hat was poised jauntily over one ear; a bouquet was displayed from one button-hole, and he brandished a great cane, of which the silver head might have rivaled that of a drum-major. Yet, the good man had not that triumphant air one might have expected to observe under present circumstances. His eyebrows were slightly frowning, and an expression of bad humor clouded his countenance. His voice and gestures were abrupt, when he requested the crowd to make room, and many lazy-pates, not sufficiently quick to range themselves on his passage, were rudely enough shoved to one side by him.

Attention was particularly directed by the assemblage to the bride. As soon as it was possible to distinguish her graceful features, her chaste mien and her tasteful attire, a cry of admiration escaped every mouth.

"How pretty she is!" cried the men.

"She is really charming!" exclaimed the women.

"What a pity we do not know who she is!" remarked a voice. "No one knows her."

"I know her," said an old soldier of the late war. "It is a good and holy lady, who watched with the sick at the Baltimore hospital, and whom they there called *The Mother of the Poor*. She cured me of a wound received in a skirmish during the war, and she has cured many others."

"I am a living proof of the truth of your words, my friend," said some one at his side. "I have myself been saved from death by her whom you call *The Mother of the Poor*."

All heads were uncovered; the one who last spoke, and who remained confounded in the crowd, was the priest, or rather the rector, of Belle Isle, an old man of gentle manners and venerable features. Recently entered upon the exercise of his holy ministry, he still bore upon his thin, pale features the trace of his sufferings at the Baltimore hospital.

"You, father?" asked Julia, who had followed Victor, to assist in the important event that was transpiring. "You have been saved from death by our mistress?"

"Yes, my daughter; the bride of Mr. Prevost is a pious lady, whom God is giving to this country as a pledge of peace and reconciliation. The blessings of Heaven are hereafter going to rest on us all by reason of her."

The testimony which the wounded soldier and the venerable pastor had furnished relating to the bride raised to its height the admiration her beauty had already inspired. It was impossible to hear the compliment of the rector; his voice was drowned in enthusiastic acclamations of applause.

Jeannette blushed with pleasure; Gerald took her hand.

"Courage, my beloved; courage!" murmured he.

And the cortege had put itself again in motion amidst still louder acclaims.

A single spectator did not share [the otherwise universal enthusiasm; this was Sailor Joe. Perched on his rock, he was bending his head forward between his knees, the better to see, and was muttering between his teeth:

"Egad! I was sure—this is really the old widow's daughter, however prettier she may be than formerly! Humph! this will soon end."

Meanwhile, the persons of the wedding-party had ranged themselves around the Rocking Stone, to which this gathering of men and women, richly dressed, formed a brilliant incasing. Jeannette was alone and standing at one extremity of the stone, while Gerald stationed himself at the other end. The crowd was pressing, compact and tumultuous, behind them.

Suddenly the greatest silence prevailed, and all countenances expressed a lively anxiety.

Gerald addressed a smile to his bride and gracefully bowed, while Jeannette prepared to remove, according to custom, the glove, embroidered with pearls, which covered her hand.

At this moment the sun, which had been concealed a portion of the day, appeared from behind the clouds, and a dazzling ray flooded the crest of the cliff and fell on the young woman. She appeared, in her white garments and her wedding-veil, as if surrounded by an aureola of gold and light. This was a favorable omen to the spectators, most of whom raised their eyes to heaven.

"God is with her!" said one of them, convinced.

A murmur of approbation spread through the crowd and soon gave way to a new silence.

Then Jeannette advanced her hand; hardly

had her white and delicate fingers touched the rock when it trembled in a sensible manner.

"It moves! It moves!" cried several voices, escaping from oppressed chests.

"It moved even before our lady had touched it!" cried Victor, with energy; "this is the second time it has ever happened; it is a miracle!"

"I have seen nothing!" exclaimed Sailor Joe, with effrontery, from the height of his rock.

"Nor I!" added a few persons in the hindermost ranks.

Gerald made a sign to the bride. She again advanced her hand, smiling.

This time the oscillation was so great that several ladies who surrounded the rock recoiled with an air of affright. The movement lasted for an entire minute.

A general discharge of guns and pistols echoed through the isle, the acclamations, the discordant noise of tambourines, of drums, and the explosion of fire-arms rose to the clouds. Many of the spectators knelt to return thanks to God. Julia, all in tears, threw herself at the feet of Jeannette, crying.

"Ah! my good mistress! All your troubles are over!"

Victor, intoxicated with pride and joy, was bawling inarticulately, leaping, dancing, and embracing every one he found in his path.

Amid the transports caused by this unexpected result, Sailor Joe let himself glide slowly down from his rock, pushed through the concourse, and threw himself at the feet of the bride.

"Madame," said he, with warmth, "I am a beastly villain; but I have changed my mind. Pardon me! I am the friend of Master Prevost; he knows it. Now I will be yours. Remember me—I am Sailor Joe!"

Without waiting a response, he arose and soon lost himself in the crowd, crying, at the top of his voice:

"Hurrah for Master Prevost! Long life to his bride!"

"Hurrah for Master Prevost! Long life to his bride!" cried the spectators, in a single voice.

"It is my turn," said the rector, with a mixture of tenderness and severity in his tone.

He mounted a stone, and, enforcing silence by a gesture, delivered to his parishioners a short discourse on the dangers of superstition. His remarks, although improvised, were not wanting in system and interest. The brave man could not attack directly a belief of which he had seen the excellent results in the Prevost family; on the other hand, as a minister of Christ, he could not tolerate such an aberration of religious sentiment in his flock. He contented himself, therefore, with deprecating, in general, those practical mysteries which are not sanctioned by the Church.

"To put an end to the strange ideas to which the Rocking Stone has given rise," added he, "I have obtained from Mr. Prevost a promise to renounce for himself, and for his heirs, the ancient practice of which you have come, for the last time, to witness the effect. Henceforth the approach to the stone will no longer be interdicted to any one; every passer or visitor can be assured that he is contemplating an inert, gross mass, subject only to the mechanical laws of equilibrium. Thus will fall, of themselves, all grievous errors, and my dear parishioners, returning to the practical faith of our grand, yet simple, religion, will have confidence hereafter only in God, our Savior and the saints."

This harangue was listened to with silence and submission. As the good rector descended from his extemporized platform, he was stopped in his way by the attorney, Brown.

"Alas! father," said the lawyer, with an uneasy accent, "whatever you may have said relating to the old talisman of the Prevosts, will you not sanction my publication, by subscription, of my philosophical dissertation, entitled, *The Rocking Stone of Belle Isle*, which will comprise a large quarto volume of seven hundred pages? This is a work of my lifetime, and you would really do very wrong in depriving posterity of my scientific researches!"

The good man grasped the hand of the old attorney.

"A work written by you, my dear Brown, could only be orthodox. As an exemplar, I will inscribe my name at the head of your subscription list," added he, sighing, "if the misfortunes of the times may permit a poor man of the church to indulge such prodigality."

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